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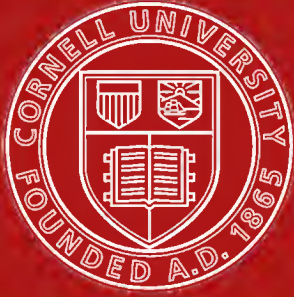
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The Don Juan of Byron

translated from Chapter xi of

La Legende de Don Juan

by

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Translation by
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It seems strange -- and yet Taine apparently saw in this choice only the caprice of a poet hard-pressed for a hero -- that the author of Childe Harold should have hit upon the story of Don Juan as the theme for a poem. If we are to believe Stendhal, it was his reading of the Venetian satiric poet, Buratti, that led Byron to write Beppo and Don Juan. This Buratti had been called to Byron's attention by Silvio Pellico. 'Unable to make a success of his comedies, Buratti recast them into the form of satires, and every six months was sent to prison by the governor of Venice.' These vehement satires were privately circulated, to the delight of Venetian society. The Countess N. lent her collection to Byron, who, 'at first, did not understand a word of it.' But gradually, as he became more accustomed to Italian, he caught the spirit of Buratti's pungent wit; and intoxicated by the poetry, was fired with an enthusiasm which spurred him on to try his fortune with like success.

There is no reason for doubting this anecdote. And did the incident have the influence upon Byron that Stendhal ascribes to it? We may well believe so, if we look upon Don Juan as a continuation of Beppo, in which the satiric vein is of the same sort as in the Venetian's poetry. Byron's pride, his desire to shine in a society of which he was ^{the} idol, and to vie with the poets then in fashion, seem also to justify Stendhal's opinion.

At this time, the poet was familiarizing himself with Italian literature, and preferably with that type of literature, half

burlesque and jocular, half licentious, which Pulci had brought into vogue in the fifteenth century. His Beppo, although directly imitated from an English poem, drew its real inspiration from the 'genre Bernesque'. The author had seen Gli Animali Parlanti by Casti and the Richardet by the poet and churchman Fortguerri; and if it is not certain that he was at that time familiar with the original text of Pulci's Morgante Maggiore, which he was later to translate while he was composing Don Juan, he did know Sir J. H. Merivale's Orlando in Roncevalles (suggested by the Morgante Maggiore) which appeared in 1814. Perhaps, although he does not mention it, he had also read the fragments of the Morgante Maggiore that the same poet had translated in the Monthly Magazine in 1806. One thing is certain -- that in 1818 he had read Berni; for, in a letter to Murray dated March twenty-fifth of that year, while he recognized Whistlecraft as his model, he declared that the real original was Berni, 'the father of that kind of writing'.

Thus Byron, through his reading in Venice, gradually came under the influence of this light and sceptical style of writing composed of banter and gravity, of sincerity and cynicism, which he himself was to adopt and to substitute for the melodramatic strains of his former works. Don Juan, like Beppo, is the offspring of this literature.

Other causes may have contributed to his undertaking the interpretation of the old legend. He began his poem when he had been two years in Venice; and nowhere in all Italy, either in Opera or on the stage of the Commedia dell'Arte, was the Convi-

tato di Pietra more often played. Although the mutilated fragments of his correspondence and his journal make no mention of it, he must have been present at more than one performance of his 'ancient friend Don Juan' whom 'all have seen in the pantomime Sent to the devil somewhat e'er his time."

He had long known the pantomime of Don Juan or the Libertine Destroyed, played for the first time by Garrick at the Drury Lane Theatre, later remodelled by Charles Antony Delpini, and taken to the Royalty Theatre in 1787. Since then, this farce in two acts, with Gluck's musical accompaniment, had often been given by a celebrated actor, Joseph Grimaldi, who took the part of Scaramouche. In 1809, in particular, he was playing at the Covent-Garden Theatre, where he was on familiar terms with Byron, who presented him with a gold snuff-box upon his departure in 1816.

But, aside from these immediate causes, the poem owes its conception to other causes, more general and more profound: these are, besides the circumstances and conditions of the age, the period of life and the state of mind of the poet when he undertook his work. Two years before he had, for the second and last time, left England, in consequence of unfortunate events in his private affairs which were to embitter his whole life-- separation from his wife, arrests, threats of imprisonment, and furious attacks by a world recoiling from him after a brief infatuation with Childe Harold. Ostracized himself, his honor stained, his future blighted, his pride wounded, and adding to these real distresses those forged by his imagination, Byron

left his country inflamed with hatred against everything that was English, everything that would irritate the wounds that had left their permanent scars in his heart. Once launched on the Continent, he entered upon an entirely new period of his stormy existence. The trip across Belgium and down the Rhine, the residence in Switzerland on the shores of Lake Geneva and in ^{the Bernese} Oberland, his reading, his relations with Shelley, the sight of the glaciers, and the impression made upon him by these grand spectacles of nature -- impressions vividly reflected in the Third Canto of Childe Harold and in Manfred -- this complete change in mode of life, in environment and in ideas, without cooling his anger against his countrymen, transformed his first bursts of fury into a settled bitterness blended with melancholy.

Several unpublished poems, composed at the same time as Manfred, are already full of the reckless scorn, ironical scepticism, and sentimental tenderness of which the works composed in Italy present the curious medley. In October, 1816, six months after leaving England, Byron arrived at Milan, and, after a short trip to Verona, settled in Venice. The life that he led for several years in this city of pleasure, the influence of the climate, the inhabitants and the social conditions, were to bring about a great reaction in his conduct and writings. Leaving England, the home of prudes, quick to condemn the object of noisy scandal, smothered in crabbed virtue, -- Byron, this victim of 'cant' and 'respectability', entered a world of loose morals, as tolerant of sins committed in the name of love as English mock-modesty pretended to be horrified by them. Venetian immorality

was such that at first the poet himself was astonished: shameless women; women with numerous lovers; husbands indulgent or openly conniving; the public enjoying the intrigues and encouraging them; love exploited in the drawing-rooms, ball-rooms and theatres, enveloped in the mystery of nights spent in gondolas on the canals, and sometimes blood-stained by the jealous sword of a betrayed lover. Over everything hung an atmosphere of voluptuousness and vice. The rays of a warmer sun, the memorials of a past of mysterious dramas, artistic splendor, and impetuous life, all made corruption at once the more reckless and the more irresistible. Escaped from the Gehenna where the severity of his countrymen had confined him, Byron flourished in this sphere of liberty, where there was every ⁱⁿ excitement to the gratification of the senses, where pleasures sought out a man who was young, handsome, and celebrated. Released from an austere and jealous wife, freed from the restraints of a society where conjugal fidelity was a dogma, the poet associated with women accounted virtuous if they had but one lover, and simply 'a little wild' if they had two, three, or even more.

He resisted this contagion, to which his temperament made him susceptible, all the less that from childhood his heart had been seeking love with a passion that marriage had utterly failed to satisfy. So, no sooner was he settled in Venice than, yielding to his instincts, and needing something to infatuate him, to make him forget his humiliation, he succumbed to this fever of pleasure, which years before, at Newstead Abbey, had

led him into the most extravagant follies. He first became enamoured of the wife of the merchant in whose house he lodged. Marianna had almond-shaped black eyes, an aquiline nose, a small mouth, and 'skin clear and soft, with a kind of hectic colour'; an oriental charm emanated from her person. Her love-affairs with the poet lasted until one day when a peasant-girl he met on the banks of the Brenta came to supplant the pretty bourgeoisie. Margarita Cogni loved Byron with the fury of a Medea and a jealousy which made her tear up the poet's letters, and revile and attack the women she suspected, and which finally drove her to throw herself into the Grand Canal. These impassioned love-affairs were not the only ones to which Byron abandoned himself. This period of his existence was nothing but a series of loose pleasures, of liaisons in all classes of society, a fury of licentiousness for which his habitual panegyrist finds no excuse other than his desire to cure his heartsickness.

As though this indulgence of his senses were a stimulant for his genius, never was the poet in fuller possession of his intellectual vigor than during these years of dissipation. Among numerous other works, he composed Beppo, that poem where free and sarcastic raillery replace for the first time the haughty and tragic strains of Childe Harold and Manfred; Beppo, that rough draft of Don Juan, that first satire, light and swift-moving, which the poet was again to take up and develop. Already there are ironical allusions to the vanity of human affairs, to love, to the faithlessness and coquetry of women, and to the jealousy of husbands; a disconcerting medley of desperate

adventures, personal allusions to the author's own feelings and misfortunes, censure of Italian licentiousness and of English prudery and pedantry; plays on words, puns; jesting and brooding; humor and sincerity -- all an amalgamation of disparate elements: satire, delineation of manners and customs, observations general and personal, all these inserted without method or reason into the story of an intrigue by turns forgotten, taken up again, again abandoned; a story that is a mere pretext for raining down upon humanity a storm of envenomed shafts. Don Juan in embryo -- such is Beppo.

The tone of this little poem pleased a society infatuated by Buratti, and its success acted upon Byron as encouragement to undertake a work on a similar theme but of greater length. In a letter to Thomas Moore, dated September 19, 1818, the poet formally declares the relation between Don Juan and Beppo : 'I have finished the first Canto --- of a poem in the style and manner of Beppo, encouraged by the good success of the same. It is called Don Juan, and is meant to be a little quietly facetious upon every thing.' In a letter of the twenty-fourth of September to Murray, he repeats that the new poem will be in the style of Beppo.

The looseness of Byron's life at this time, the influence of the low moral standards of Venetian society, the recollections of the past which artificial pleasures had not wiped out, this frenzy of drunkenness and bitterness -- these are what produced Beppo and Don Juan. In these two works, especially the second, we have the faithful reflection of the manifold and con-

tradietory emotions that were surging in the soul of their author: thirst for pleasure, wounded pride, rancor against his fellow men, their laws, customs, opinions and prejudices. The poet, who, more than any one else, has always revealed himself in his works, was then in that psychological state where a man feels still more the necessity to express himself, to confide the story of his life, his emotions, his sorrows, and his joys. Byron's letters written at this time give proof of this yearning. From the month of July he had been thinking of writing his memoirs, and he soon undertook an autobiography which was almost finished by the end of August. At the same time he was working on the First Canto of Don Juan.

However, if these reasons explain why the poet, during his residence in Venice, felt the desire to write a work in which to set down, even more perhaps than in its predecessor, his ideas, his actual feelings and his whole personality, they do not explain why, to make this new confession, Byron should have chosen the subject of Don Juan. Childe Harold, Manfred, and Conrad, being imaginary types, could easily be invested with the real states of mind and dreams of their author and become the ideal expression of his inner self; but Don Juan, a legendary type, whose character and traditions were well-known and consecrated by long years of tradition, would not readily yield to the caprices of a new creation, to become the mouthpiece of another personality. Don Juan is one of those heroes whose general, essential characteristics have been once fixed. It

is futile to trace their development from age to age; in spite of modifications in detail, they remain fundamentally the same; their individuality is too strong and too distinctive to be worn down and become the mere reflection of another.

Besides, the events in the midst of which the career of the Burlador unfolds do not belong to the domain of reality. Their supernatural strangeness may be, to a certain extent, suitable to a character who, like Molière's hero, though very real and very human, is none the less a general, abstract type, and not an individual; a creation of the imagination, and not the faithful copy of an actual, living personality. But these events could not form the proper framework for a story in which the hero is above all the portrait of his creator, and whose adventures are borrowed from the life of his creator. That Tirso, Molière, and Shadwell could introduce a picture of reality into an unreal intrigue is self-explanatory: the reality remained anonymous and impersonal. We have seen, on the contrary, how much Goldini distorted his material, and what a hybrid work he composed in trying to incorporate into the story his personal experiences. The two elements were obviously too antagonistic. Between Byron's conception of the subject and the exigencies of tradition, the antinomy was even more irreducible. There was nothing in common between the marvelous legend of Don Juan and the poet's existence, between Byron's character and that of his hero.

Why, then, instead of creating once more out of whole cloth the character he needed to express his personality and unburden

his full heart, did Byron go borrow from the theatre a hero so little adapted to his purpose ? The poet has given several reasons. They are not complete and not sufficiently explicit. At the outset he writes:

I want a hero: an uncommon want,

When every year and month sends forth a new one.

But can't find any in the present age

Fit for my poem -----

So, as I said, I'll take my friend Don Juan.-1:1,5.

Later he explains why, unlike Pulci, one of his models, he has not taken a fantastic theme: he 'chooses' a modern subject as more meet, 'more appropriate to the circumstances. To be sure, since his muse disdains fables, and 'mostly sings of human things and actions', fiction would not suit him; but what a singular imposition to present Don Juan to us as a living reality! Is the poet conscious of the paradox ? I do not know; but he has handled it with characteristic nonchalance. He had modified the character of the hero, discarded the old Spanish intrigue, heretofore always respected in its general development; he has changed the whole work, tone and substance. Having thus completely renovated the primitive legend, in form as in plot, he could seriously declare that he was treating a modern subject.

It was not, however, by a mere freak that Byron chose Don Juan. In several places he has indicated the goal that he set himself in writing the poem: he wished to make a general survey, a satire upon humanity, and the spirit that inspires such a work

is the spirit of irony and scepticism. Now, to look at it more closely, the story of Don Juan, with ever so slight a change, was admirably adapted to this purpose: since his first appearance, the hero had been in the process of evolution from which he was one day to emerge transformed from the mere debauchée into a seeker after adventures, always in quest of a new sensation. He has become -- and Molière was the first to have this conception of him -- the man who, young at first and drunk with pleasure, runs the gamut of life and becomes sated with the pleasures it affords him. The meanness of human joys is soon apparent to him; he conceives a deep-seated contempt for his fellow men and for all the creations of their genius. But Molière's Don Juan is still a marquis confined within the rather narrow limits of French life and aristocratic society. This marquis knew the court and something of the city; with the people he had but slight acquaintance; he is not sprung from native soil; he has not studied the men of all countries. His experience is short, his psychology is incomplete; he has not even known all the passions.

But now Don Juan was to go farther, was to enlarge the sphere of his observations: it was across the world, across the whole range of emotions that rack the human heart under all skies, that he was to conduct his investigations. This mighty quest was to serve him as the occasion for studying the legion representatives of the human race. At each new proof his scepticism was to be reenforced, his irony becoming more bitter before the emptiness of human life: and at last, disgusted now and

despairing of ever coming upon his ideal, he was to live out his days in seclusion or in the tame compromise of a 'marriage de convenance'.

This conception was possible only at a time when the political conditions, the philosophical notions, and the higher aspirations of individuals and nations forced a man to search everywhere and anywhere for the realization of the happiness which has long tantalized him. In the end, Don Juan was to fall back again, with a still ruder shock, into reality, bringing home from his investigations only the definitive proof of the baseness of his fellow men in all stations, under all governments, in all latitudes. This seeker after experience, enthusiastic at first, but soon becoming a cynic, as despondent over mankind as he would have been hopeful for them, this poet drunk with all the emotions of sense and soul, this lover of beauty and external nature, this philanthropist fired by liberty and justice, now transformed into a morose sceptic -- was not this a picture of Byron himself? Of Byron as he was, or as he 'deemed' himself? And the poet in search of a hero in whom to incarnate what he had become, since new proofs and long residence in Italy had further modified his character and his outlook upon life -- could he find a character that would fulfill his requirements better than Don Juan?

Together they could scour the earth for adventures, and in the pursuit of happiness and truth take a general review of humanity. And also, was not Don Juan the eternal man, ~~the average sensual man~~, always, from time to time, being recreated, yet

always the same under his manifold transformations ? -- +The man who here on earth pursues his dream sublime or vulgar, a material dream of pleasure and fortune, or an ideal dream of fantastic delights.

As for the marble statue -- did it not come to symbolize to Byron the implacable destiny that destroyed his illusions ? And for this reason too, was not Don Juan really Byron with all the passions that inflamed him ?

Finally, is there not an even closer resemblance between the poet and the legendary hero ? For this gallant who from the beginning had made the conquest of women the aim and only happiness of his life, was of the same stock as the inveterate lover of Miss Parker, Mary Chaworth, Marianna, Margarita Cogni, the Countess Guiccioli, and so many others ! And was not Don Juan the free-thinking hero, flouting all laws and prejudices, raised above human conventions ? Was not this very pride, egotistical and disdainful, which already characterized Molière's hero, -- was it not always the predominant element in the heart of Byron ?

And Byron must have been instinctively drawn to Don Juan by a sympathy growing out of numerous traits common to them. Thus, Faust was not his choice of a character in whom to incarnate himself, and through whom to express his dreams and disappointments, his loves and hates, his whole philosophy. There was too great a gulf between the German hero and himself: Faust is the dreamer, the scholar; Don Juan the man of action who seeks happiness not in the quest of a visionary truth, but in

the winning of a material good. Similarly, Byron never slackened his pursuit of a concrete ideal: not only did he exhaust the delights of love, but called upon ambition, politics, the glory of the orator, and the struggle for liberty, to satisfy the cravings which tormented him. His English temperament and his ancestry of seamen and conquerors naturally made the man of realities in him predominate over the man of dreams and fancies.

And so the heroes in whom he has more or less faithfully represented himself are men who strive to gratify the desires of their imaginations by an intense activity: Childe Harold, Conrad, and Mazeppa love to roam over the face of the earth, to journey on horse over the steppes, and to battle with tempests; they delight in encounters on horseback, the excitement of the harbor, and the capturing and pillaging of cities. Don Juan is of the same race: constantly renewed love-affairs, strange exploits, battles, shipwrecks, the life of soldier, seaman, and politician--these he must have to allay his insatiable thirst for action.

Again, Faust has shaken off the yoke of belief: his is an intellectual revolt. Don Juan frees himself primarily from the moral and social yoke: his independence is even more pronounced in his conduct than in his thought; his quarrel is with conventions. The same is true of Byron, whose scepticism is more a protest against the slavery of religious practices than a revolt of reason against faith.

Such are the several causes immediate and general, that prompted Byron to take up again the old theme of Don Juan. In the hero he found enough of himself -- such as the nineteenth

century was to conceive him -- to paint himself under his name, even as he had painted himself under that of Childe Harold. Transformed and adapted to a different purpose, the plot permitted of the succession of adventures, the train of events, and the tour of the world that the author needed for his general survey of ideas and social conditions.

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It was in Venice, on September 6, 1818, that Byron commenced Don Juan. In a letter of September 19th to Moore, he advised him of the completion of the First Canto, accomplished at the same time that he was finishing Mazoppea. He immediately started on the Second Canto, which was ready by the end of January, 1819. Various obstacles retarded the continuation of the poem from this point on, such as the objections of his editor, who hesitated to publish the work as a whole because of its immorality and the lampoons it contained; also, besides the rebuff met with by the first two cantos, the new relations of the poet with the Countess Guiccioli, and the heavy anxiety which this liaison caused him from the beginning. Work on Don Juan was resumed, however, after the return of the two lovers to Venice during the second half of the month of September, 1819. When he visited the poet at that time, Moore found him busy at the Third Canto. By October 28th, he had completed about a hundred stanzas, although at the same time he was writing The Prophecy of Dante. At the beginning of December, he had got through two hundred stanzas, and the canto was finished the 10th of the same month. The last part had been

written at Ravenna, where Byron had gone to rejoin the Countess. He had, as may be seen, taken more time to compose this canto than he had spent on the two preceding cantos. The criticism directed at him, not only by the reviews and the public, but even by his friends, was the principal cause of this loss of facility. Finding the canto too long -- it comprised two hundred twenty-eight stanzas -- he cut it in two. And yet in the two new cantos together the plot is hardly as much developed as in either one of the first two.

The poem now suffered an interruption due both to the strictures passed upon it and the anxiety caused the poet by the quarrels of the Countess and her husband. At the same time, Byron was busied with other works. He was translating the Morgante Maggiore of Pulci and was beginning Marino Faliero, Sardanapolis, The Two Foscari, Cain, and others. Nevertheless, this first interruption was only of short duration. Byron, who had promised himself not to continue it, did not keep his word, and in a letter to Thomas Moore, dated December 9th of the same year, he announced that he was working on the Fifth Canto of Don Juan and had finished one hundred forty-nine stanzas.

The revolutionary movement was then in full swing: over Naples and through Romagna swept a storm of revolt. Byron enthusiastically enrolled himself in the cause of liberty, and sent a subscription to the Neapolitan government accompanied by an impassioned letter. But in the midst of the general effervescence he kept steadily at work: he was continuing Sardanapolis and Cain, and was writing Francesca of Rimini,^{and} a tragedy on Tiberius, without

abandoning Don Juan. In his journal of February 27, 1821, he mentions that in bed that morning he composed a stanza of the Fifth Canto, which he was bringing to a close. He seems to have intended, even at this time, to press on a considerable distance with the work, the plan of which was taking definite shape in his mind; but the failure of the Italian Revolution, the exile of the father and the brother of the Countess Guiccioli, and the dangers which Byron was at this time running, again interrupted the poem, which this time barely escaped being finally abandoned. The Countess Guiccioli had read the first cantos as they came out in a French translation, and in spite of her fairly scandalous relations with the poet, was not insensible to the immorality of the poetry: she asked that the work be given up, and obtained her request. On July 6th, Byron wrote Murray that, yielding to the wishes of the Countess, he would not continue Don Juan.

The poem seemed, then, to have come to an end without being completed. But the theme lay too near the heart of the author, and into it he was putting too much of himself, for this renunciation to be sincere. His loves and hates, all his bitterness and yearning he was expressing in this work, and he was called upon to abandon it! It was the monumental achievement of his thought that he must turn his back on.

Byron's submission could be but momentary, and death only was to interrupt a poem which, more than Childe Harold and more than Manfred, was fashioned out of the life and soul of its author. Even after his promise to the Countess Guiccioli he

again and again returned to what he had written. When his friend Shelley visited him in August, a time when recent events had plunged him into a sad state of physical weariness and mental depression, Byron read to him the last canto he had composed, greatly to the admiration of the author of Prometheus Unbound. At the same time he was engaged with his editor on the publication of the poem, was defending it against criticism, maintaining the truth of his portraiture, declaring that upon rereading Don Juan he found it excellent, and expressing bitter regret at not continuing it, for he had mentally sketched the plan of several cantos, and contemplated 'tak[ing] [his hero] the tour of Europe.' (Letter to Murray, September 4, 1821).

Being so disposed, Byron would necessarily go back, sooner or later, to his theme. He did, in fact, resume work on it in June, and on July 2th he announced to Murray from Pisa that he would probably have three or four new cantos ready for the autumn. He had been willing to promise his mistress that henceforth Don Juan should be more decent and more sentimental. From then on he made up for lost time. In August the Eighth Canto was finished, and he was beginning the Ninth, which was almost finished at the end of the same month. The others followed in rapid succession. Having left Pisa, where he had composed them, for Genoa in the early part of the autumn, the poet busied himself publishing them. He entrusted this edition to Mr. Hunt, who had collaborated with him and Shelley on The Liberal. In March, 1823, he finished the Sixteenth Canto. A radical change in his life was to prevent further prosecution of the work.

The struggle of Greece for her independence began at this time to agitate all Europe. It could not fail to have its effect on an enthusiastic apostle of liberty such as Byron proclaimed himself. After his first voyage his imagination never ceased to turn back toward 'blue Olympus'. The attraction he felt for the country and the desire to draw attention upon himself, to play the hero, had equal weight in bringing about his departure for Greece. During the early part of April 1823, he entered into relations with Captain Blaquière, charged by the committee founded in London to go study the situation at close range. Thereafter his whole attention was given to the Hellenic question and his own departure. The poet who once told Moore that literature was not his vocation, and who had never ceased to covet, in England as well as in Italy, a political career, found himself again a man of action. He abandoned poesy to plunge with ardor into this new adventure. In July he left Genoa in company with Count Gamba, brother to Countess Guiccioli, and first made his way to Cephalonia. There he remained a good while, awaiting developments and studying the condition of Greece. It was not until December that he was able to escape the surveillance of the Turkish fleet and set sail for Missolonghi.

The prolongation of his sojourn in the Ionian Islands had furnished material for malicious construction: it was alleged that instead of devoting himself to heroic occupations, the poet, comfortably installed in a delightful villa, was working on Don Juan. Moore had communicated these rumors to him,

greatly to his indignation. In a letter written from Missolonghi and dated March 4, 1824, he replied to his friend that he had continued neither Don Juan nor any other poem. 'Poetry', he said in this connection, 'should only occupy the idle, and in more serious affairs it would be ridiculous'. On April 18th the fever that caused his death brought the poem to its final standstill. However, before leaving Italy, the poet had had time to write the first stanzas of a Seventeenth Canto, which he carried with him when he went to Cephalonia. Found in his room at Missolonghi, the stanzas, fourteen in number, were turned over to Mr. Hobhouse, and were published for the first time in 1903, by the last editor, John Murray.

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Although unfinished, the work was far enough advanced to have its full significance. The intentions of the author were realized, and the end would have only prolonged the poem without bringing in a new element. As it is, the work hardly lacks anything but a conclusion. At the point where they were interrupted, the adventures of Don Juan would have been only a continuation of the past, the most varied life being able, on the whole, only to repeat itself. For human events unroll in a series of circles more or less alike. In all climes men have, at bottom, the same passions and vices, and their study, after passing a certain point, opens up only what is already known. Don Juan — could have continued to make the different countries of Europe the field of his observation. He would have got himself more

blasé, but he would have been able only to establish his identity with the average man. Had he found France more enthusiastic and more frivolous than formal England, and Germany more sentimental and more materialistic, what new phase would he have revealed to us of the character of these peoples, and above all of the soul of the poet of which he himself was the reflection ? And when, wearied of gratifying his curiosity in all corners of the earth, he would have wished to settle down and put an end to his vagabond existence, what would have been his fate ? Byron himself had no idea, and his embarrassment is readily understood. A life such as that of Don Juan could end in but one of three ways: brutally, in the thick of a military or amorous exploit; in the banality of a marriage de raison; or in cynical and morose bachelorhood. Don Juan would doubtless have passed the age when the first of these solutions is probable. Between the other two there is little choice; either would have meant weariness and disgust. Perhaps it is best for the hero that his adventures are cut short in the midst of a nocturnal escapade.

Besides, the poet's conception of the story hardly conduced to regular and systematic composition, forming a complete whole with beginning, development, and conclusion. A person unacquainted with the circumstances, who read Don Juan with an eye to the preceding Don Juans, would look in vain for the familiar theme, the well-known plot, the personages hallowed by tradition: Donna Anna, Elvire, and the status of the Commander. In vain he would seek Don Juan himself under the pseudonym that cloaks Byron. He would see a long train of unfamiliar events and a hero with nothing

in common with his professed ancestors; he would see, above all, a delineation of social conditions, philosophy, satire, and digressions, anecdotes, sketches, and personal reflections; the ancient legend he would no longer recognize.

The fact is, everything is changed: theme, plot, characters. Into a new frame the poet has put a new picture. For a dramatic work he substitutes a poem divided into an indefinite number of cantos, each comprising at least one hundred to one hundred fifty stanzas. He takes his hero from the time of his birth and follows him, step by step, through the thousand incidents of his existence, each adventure being only a pretext for portraying and satirizing humanity and setting forth the ideas of the author on all subjects -- ethics, religion, politics, and literature.

Don Juan is born of parents who are little calculated to understand each other, and who lose no time in obtaining a divorce. His rigid, pedantic education, under the direction of a bigoted, narrow-minded mother, has its natural culmination in a scandalous adventure with a married woman. For at sixteen Don Juan, as yet ignorant of love, is initiated by the too ardent wife of an old dotard. Discovered in the bed of the lady, he escapes not without doing violence to the husband's nose. This affair opens the eyes of his mother; she finally realizes that her son must know other phases of life besides those set forth in the expurgated books of his preceptor. So Don Juan departs under the conduct of the tutor; but a storm conveniently comes to hand to rid the young man of his troublesome mentor, and after exposing him to a thousand deaths, casts him in a swoon upon an

unknown island. When he recovers consciousness, a young girl is beside him. She is the daughter of a pirate, the gentle Haidée, whose heart is moved first to pity, then to love, at the sight of the bonny unfortunate. An exquisite idyl ensues, and continues until the day when the unexpected return of the father shatters a happiness into which sin had crept. Don Juan is bound and carried on board a ship together with other captives, while the girl who loved him dies of grief over his loss.

Taken to Constantinople to be sold, Don Juan catches the fancy of a favorite of the Sultan's harem. He is purchased, and is introduced in female attire into the women's apartments. After a pretty perilous adventure, in the course of which Don Juan justifies only too well the jealousy of the Sultana, he escapes with a fellow captive, an officer in the army of Souwaroff.

The two fugitives set out to join the Russian force under the walls of Ismail. Don Juan distinguishes himself by his exploits in the capture of the city, and saves the life of a young Turkish girl. His attractive bearing and the glory he has achieved lead the general to select him to take the official report of victory to the Empress Catherine. The happy news of which he is the bearer, and still more his grace, his distinction, and the elegance of his uniform, touch the heart of the sovereign, and he becomes her favorite forthwith.

Soon, wearied by the amorous exactions of Catherine, he goes to England for a respite, under the pretext of performing a secret mission. He arrives in London, that vaunted stronghold of virtue and liberty. Received and fêted by fashionable English society,

he very soon discovers the deep-seated vices concealed beneath a show of respectability. He enters upon several adventures, which are suspended in the midst of a nocturnal escapade in a love-affair in a castle. Had he completed the satire on English life, Byron would probably have taken his hero into another country, into France or Germany, and the recital would have continued without further variety.

Such in brief is the inconsequential fashion in which the poem unfolds. Nothing, or very little, remains of the legend proper. Not only have all the supernatural elements disappeared, but the plot itself has been modified, in main import as well as in detail. Perhaps a few reminiscences of the primitive tale are to be found in the struggle of Don Juan with the husband of his first mistress. But the tragic scene in which the Spanish hero kills the father of his victim is here replaced by a clownish fist fight, in the course of which the only blood spilt is that which streams from the nose of the outraged husband. A more direct echo from the early legend, though the circumstances are quite changed, is the account of the tempest that wrecked Don Juan's ship and stranded him lifeless on a far-distant shore, to recover his senses in the arms of an unknown and beautiful maiden. Aside from these episodes, nothing of the legend of Don Juan remains in the poem of Byron.

This complete reconstruction of the plot was the result of the new significance it had acquired. Neither a drama nor an unreal legend borrowed from the past could accommodate itself to Byron's purpose of presenting a satiric tableau of European society

at the beginning of the nineteenth century and advertising his own opinions on the most diverse subjects. A portrayal so modern as his, and allusions so personal, could not be foisted upon a supernatural fable. Besides, his conception of the subject was too vast, too diffuse, for the narrow limits of a dramatic work. He must use an informal, flexible style of composition, to give his fancy full rein to express itself when he wished and in what manner he wished. It is natural that Byron made Manfred a drama: there it is a very definite state of mind, a crisis, that he is analyzing; but in Childe Harold and Don Juan it is a series of states of mind, a succession of pictures, that he is presenting; it is above all a daily confession made to his reader.

Bearing this in mind, we must not expect in the poem a pre-conceived plan or a steadily developed plot. When he began to write, doubtless Byron well knew what he wished to do, but he had by no means determined the order of the events and episodes that were to form the framework of his tale. He had not decided how the parts should be knit together; he did not know, when he was describing the romance of the hero on an island of the Ionian Sea, whither the caprice of his imagination would next bear him. In February 1821, that is, three years after having begun his poem, he could not yet say how he should end it. To Murray, who asked him the plan of his work, he replied: 'I have no plan -- I had no plan; but I had or have materials.' (Letter of August 12, 1819). He wrote when the spirit moved, his 'materials' being the events of the day and the incidents of his own life. To forestall criticism of one of his numerous digressions he simply says :

'Tis my way;

Sometimes with and sometimes without occasion,
I write what's uppermost, without delay;

This narrative is not meant for narration,
But a mere airy and fantastic basis,
To build up common things with common places.

--xiv:7.

In another place he resumes :

With no great care for what is nicknamed glory,

But speculating as I cast mine eye
On what may suit or may not suit my story,

And never straining hard to versify,
I rattle on exactly as I'd talk
With any body in a ride or walk.

--xv:19.

He composed, then, at the dictates of his fancy, without ever knowing what would be the scope of his poem or at what moment he would lay it aside. At one time he reckoned on writing fifty cantos; at another one hundred; yet again he speaks of one hundred fifty. These numbers were evidently tossed off at random, but they prove the poet's indecision. In his letter of February 16, 1821, to which we must repeatedly revert, since it contains his most explicit statement of his intentions, he declares that the Fifth Canto is still only the beginning of the poem. He adds: 'To how many cantos this may extend, I know not, nor whether (even if I live) I shall complete it.'

So unmethodical was the composition that several times Byron transposed certain parts, and suppressed, added, or inserted others. The stanzas to the Duke of Wellington, which open the Ninth Canto, were originally at the beginning of the Third. On July 6, 1821, he announced to Murray his intention of omitting, at the instance of Hobhouse, that stanza in the Fifth Canto which deals with the love-affair between Queen Semiramis and her horse. This stanza was, however, preserved. Another time he blotted six stanzas to satisfy the scruples of his editor.

In external unity, then, the work is lacking; but it has an inner unity that lies in the satirical and moral significance with which it is imbued from beginning to end. It might be divided into two parts of slightly differing character, each corresponding to a stage in Byron's development and marking the ascendancy of contending influences. The first, which comprises the first five cantos, is the more licentious part, where love holds first place. This was interrupted, as we have seen, at the request of the Countess Guiccioli. Since in the meantime the poem Cain, in which he depicted doubt and revolt against morality and religion, had been condemned, Byron protested against the scandal it raised by joining with Hunt to found The Liberal, and in it continuing Don Juan. But in this second part love is no longer in the foreground. The poet's attacks upon convention and conventional opinion are redoubled in violence and bitterness. Between the Fifth and the Sixth Canto the character of the poem has changed; the 'Donjuanism' diminishes as the social phase of the satire takes on greater im-

portance and gathers venom.

Composed at intervals during several years, irregularly, influenced in turn by travel, reading, conversations, and disappointments past and present, the work becomes the product, not simply of a general, preconceived idea, but of the many and different forces that have acted upon the poet in four years.

There are few writers so ready as the author of Don Juan to carry over into their poetry the echo of their emotions and perplexities. Byron's imagination transformed everything into poetry -- events, ideas, and feelings.

As on the beach the waves at last are broke,

Thus to their extreme verge the passions brought

Dash into poetry ----

iv:106

he has said in speaking of himself.

So it is not without interest, nor yet importance to the understanding of Don Juan, to investigate the many circumstances grouped about the composition of each canto, the traces of which readily come to light if we study the poem and the life of Byron side by side, and in some way coordinate the two.

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We have spoken of the conditions under which the First Canto was commenced: Byron had abandoned himself to the pursuit of artificial pleasure in the old hope of dulling his pain. His shallow and short-lived liaisons, the study into which he plunged at Venice of the ethical code of the Italians who received him into their homes, 'sometimes merely as 'amico di casa' and sometimes as 'Amico

di cuore 'of the Dama', and furnished him with material that he used in his poem, clearly prompted the flippant portrayal of love found in the First and Second Cantos. It is a sensual, tropic love, such as abounds under a Venetian sky; an ardent, spontaneous love, quickened by a glance, the swish of a garment; a love that shamelessly revels in the marriage-bed, in the very presence of an absurdly inadequate husband. It is a love in which the weak young gallant, still almost ignorant of the mystery, holds the fan and carries the shawl, nor withdraws his services at the door of the ^{bedroom} ~~alcove~~, while his mistress loves him with the passion of a nature untamed by the convention of a warm and voluptuous country. In the poem her name is Julia; in reality, Marianna or Margarita Cogni. And Byron is passing from one to the other -- his poetic conception to his experience -- as he recounts the adventures of Don Juan and the wife of Alfonso, and writes these ironical and sensual stanzas in which he inveighs against marriage and extolls inconstancy:

But soon Philosophy came to my aid,

And whisper'd, "Think of every sacred tie!"

"I will, my dear Philosophy!" I said,

"But then her teeth, and then, oh, Heaven!

her eye!" - 11:210.

and

that which

Men call inconstancy is nothing more

Than admiration due where Nature's rich

Profusion with young beauty covers o'er

Some favored object; ----- 11:211.

At the same time a far different influence was working on the poet, more remote and indirect, but more profound: the ever-galling recollections of his conjugal disappointments and bitterness against a wife whose austerity was so little adapted to the irregularities of her husband. So, still in the first bursts of fury, he painted her in the person of Dona Inez, the woman of unshakable principles, 'mathematically square,' endowed with logic, wisdom, piety; without a weakness, equally superior by her attainments and her virtues; perfect, and by her very perfection insufferable. As opposed to her, he makes her husband as passionate and irregular as she herself was cold and strait-laced. He tells of their estrangement, drawing upon his recollections of his own domestic misfortunes: violent quarrels, grievances on both sides, the interference of friends and relatives making matters worse; the wife leaving home, convinced of her husband's madness; the judgment of the world brought down upon him; the calumnies with which he was overwhelmed. These reproaches that he was uttering in his poem he was at the same time pouring forth in his letters. Do not these lines dated from Venice at the time he was composing his First Canto, seem written the same day as the stanza that follows them? 'I could have forgiven the dagger or the ^{bowl} ~~bow~~,--any thing but the deliberate desolation piled upon me, when I stood alone upon my hearth, with my household gods shivered around me.' (Letter to Moore, September 19, 1818).

Whate'er might be his worthlessness or worth,
Poor fellow! he had many things to
wound him.

It was a trying moment that which
found him
Standing alone beside his desolate hearth,
Where all his household gods lay shiver'd
round him.-----1:36.

At the same time the pecuniary embarrassments which so constantly beset him and the heavy debts at high interest that he had been forced to contract upon coming of age, the cares of which harassed him even after his marriage, moved him to lively invective against usurers. There were also the memory of his strict and pedantic education, his grudges against the dignitaries of the bar, against critics and their criticism, which crowded under his pen and with the voluptuousness of the description mingled a sarcastic sadness.

Written as it was upon return from nights of debauchery, this First Canto becomes a succession of licentious pictures and morbid reflections, the contrast of which startles and disconcerts us. At one moment the poet, in the full swing of pleasure, madly sings of love; then suddenly the ghost of the past darkens the present, and the stanza opened with a laugh closes in a sob. The libertine hand that has just pictured Don Juan hidden under the sheets of Julia's bed pens these plaintive lines :

My days of love are over; me no more

The charms of maid, wife, and still less

of widow,

Can make the fool of which they made before,--

Ambition was my idol, which was broken

Before the shrines of Sorrow, and of Pleasure --

Now, like Friar Bacon's Brazen Head, I've

spoken,

"Time is, Time was, Time's past":--a chymic

treasure

Is glittering Youth, which I have spent

betimes --

My heart in passion, and my head on rhymes.

--1:216, 217.

The circumstances and mental processes that influenced the Second Canto are but slightly different. Here one finds a profusion of fleeting impressions that make the poet glorify inconstancy, joyous glimpses of a voyage he had made to Cadiz after his first departure from England, with an affectionate description of the city,

And such sweet girls!--I mean, such

graceful ladies,

Their very walk would make your bosom

swell;-- --11:5.

and details of a shipwreck so minutely recorded that his detractors charged him with plagiarism, an accusation to which he replied, 'Almost all Don Juan is real life, either my own or from people I knew.' (Letter to Murray, August 23, 1821.) And here he does, indeed, borrow from the account which his grandfather, the sailor so famous for his shipwrecks that he was nicknamed 'Foul-Weather-Jack', had published at the age of seventeen. There are also further mention of his pecuniary embarrassment, slurs upon the Jews who had bled him, and profuse details of his life, as for instance an allusion to an intrigue at a masquerade, and to the way he once in Seville conversed, by the aid of a dictionary, with a young girl whom he loved.

The Third Canto -- afterward divided into two -- was composed at Ravenna and Venice, at the time when he was entering upon his relations with the Countess Guiccioli. It bears marks enough of the vexations that were tormenting him: the Countess had fallen ill; her husband, at first indifferent, had conceived the plan of having his indulgence requited by the loan of a thousand pounds sterling; ugly stories got abroad touching the morality of the poet, who was said to have caused the death of a young girl whom he had seduced and then abandoned; and when fears for his health were added to these heavy cares, he felt so discouraged by the end of the year 1819 that he thought at one time of returning to England. He wrote letters to the Countess filled with sadness and resignation. 'Io sono cittadino del mondo', he said, '--tutti i paesi sono equali per me.' At the same time the reviewers re-

doubled their denunciation of Don Juan; the author was charged with having travestied womanhood and outraged morality. Far from shaking off his wretchedness, Byron sank deeper into it; he cast about for reading congenial to his state of mind. So it was that he began to read the Geschichte des Agathon of Wieland. The depressing scepticism in which the romance of the German writer is steeped, and the personal disenchantment to which it testifies, found an echo in the heart of the English poet.

The Third and Fourth Cantos, written in such mood, are the saddest that have come from the pen of Byron: here is the pathetic end to the adventures of Don Juan and Haidée in the touching death of the young girl; here are melancholy reflections on the miseries of life, the passing away of dear ones, the frailty of love and friendship, without which life is 'mere breath', on the happiness of those mowed down by death in their youth, on the nothingness of ~~every thing~~^{everything}. The hostility of the critics has stung the poet to bitter retort: sometimes he replies to those who accuse him of plotting against the religious and moral standard of his country; sometimes he impugns the characters of contemporary poets, taunting them with their duplicity, their flattery, their lies; sometimes he takes the offensive, to jeer at Coleridge, Southey and Wordsworth, whose Benjamin the Waggoner he had just read. Even in his poetry we find hints of his melancholy and sleepless nights, of the fierce fevers that parched him and made him drain as many as fifteen bottles of Seltzer water without being able to quench his thirst. There are also incidents which at long range appear

insignificant, but which at the time made so strong an impression as to be incorporated into the poem. After making several visits to the monument of Gaston de Foix and the mausoleum of Dante, he describes the column raised to the conqueror of Ravenna and the tomb wherein lies the Florentine poet. An allusion to his stay in Troas brings to the surface reflections on the existence of Troy; his reading of a traveller's description of Tripoli inspires the picture in the Third Canto of the interior of Lambro's palace. Happening to be at work on the translation of the Morgante Maggiore, he devotes one stanza to the subject of the Italian poem. The misfortunes of a troupe of actors sold into the Barbary States by their impresario give him the germ of a similar anecdote.

In the Fifth Canto one finds the same influences at work and the same method of procedure in the composition: trifling incidents and unimportant details are sprinkled among the most profound and melancholy thoughts. Here an allusion to last night's attack of indigestion; there to an assassination committed under his windows; again to the desperate adventure of Queen Caroline, accused of guilty relations with her chamberlain Bergami, which ^{or to the compliment paid him by Ali Pasha on the} then held public attention; delicacy of his hands; there is even a tender echo of his first love for Mary Duff and Mary Chaworth, apropos of the name 'Mary'; and again sad reflections on the fickleness of fortune, the world's indifference to human feelings, and the impenetrable mystery of death. The harsh realities which the poet found in the love of the Countess Guiccioli, instead of the ideal dream he had conceived, tintured this part of the poem with bit-

terness; when resumed after the interruption caused by the affrighted modesty of the Countess and other circumstances, the work took on a more sarcastic aspect, which is explained by the changed character of Byron's suffering -- disappointment in his love, disillusionment caused the liberal enthusiast by the checking of a revolt in Romagna, the loss of a lawsuit, threats of imprisonment, the divorce of the Countess, the continued animosity of the critics, and the death of his daughter Allegra. Byron evinces, at the close of this canto, more scepticism and more contempt for man, for his beliefs, his ideas, and all the creations of his genius. The influence of his reading in Switzerland (among other things the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau) again makes itself felt, as well as the influence of relations he had formed, notably with Shelley, like himself an outcast from his own people boiling with the spirit of revolt and hatred. Light irony gives place to sardonic misanthropy, violence worthy the author of Prometheus, and a haughty scepticism inspired by Wieland. Harshness becomes the general tone of the last cantos.

These cantos are still filled with the details of the daily life of the poet. He reads a work in three volumes which has just appeared (1820) in Paris, the Essai sur l'Histoire Ancienne et Moderne de la Nouvelle Russie, by the marquis de Castelman, and he too thinks of writing the story of the siege of Ismail. From an anecdote told him of the duc de Richelieu, the governor of Odessa, he borrows the story of the young Turkish girl rescued by Don Juan. Current events also serve him with numerous subjects for satire, as for instance the tyranny of the Prime Minister Londonderry, the

distress in Ireland, the alleged attempt of which Wellington was the victim at Paris, the Marinet affair, and George IV's trip to Ireland, with the cool reception accorded him on his return. And especially are there allusions to personal matters: to an article by Jeffrey; to a former stay in Scotland, which had made a deep and lasting impression upon him; to the manor of his forefathers, which he describes in detail at the close of the Fifteenth Canto; to a legend of Newstead Abbey, in connection with a phantom he believed to have seen himself in 1814; to his relations in Athens in 1814 with the youngest of his host's three daughters, Katinka, whose name he has given to one of the attendants of the Sultana. And finally there are his grievances against English society, which furnished him with increasingly abundant material as he progressed in the composition of the poem.

The adventures of Don Juan, then, only form a central thread-- which moreover is often abandoned -- to give the poet the opportunity of arranging in some order the various observations suggested him both by his own life and the spectacle of the lives of others. This is the plan already followed in Childe Harold. In certain respects, therefore, the poem is an autobiography. It is, in great measure, written under the influence of past or present events; but more than that, it is compounded of the most intimate ideas and feelings of its author. It is filled with Byron's inner life even more than with the external facts of his existence. It is the faithful representation of the Ego of Byron, a precious document that lays bare his true personality.

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This document presents a double aspect. One is artificial and conventional, entirely superficial: the poet plays a part, affects emotion and aspirations inaccessible to the vulgar; gives himself up, as his rôle demands, to extravagances; surrounds himself with madcaps, buys bears; and exclaims one day, at the sight of a yataghan ^{that he should} : ~~I should~~ like to know the sensations of a man after he has committed a murder. He is quite the hero, in attitude and gesture, such as he is represented in most of his portraits -- draped in a flowing cloak, hair in disorder, an air of inspiration. He is the grand man on his pedestal, who from the summit of the Jungfrau, or from the cloud in which Lucifer envelops him, dominates the world and declaims to it. He is a creature removed from the mass of humanity by his passions, his anomalies, his very vices; a fabulous personage who would have us believe that his life contains dramas and miseries untold, that his past is a frightful mystery outrunning our ordinary powers of conception. He is the traditional Byron, the Byron known to the public, the Byron that exerted so profound an influence on the Romanticists. He is what the poet himself has painted in the greater part of his works: the proud scorner of mankind, the exalted spirit ^{borne} ~~home~~ aloft by unattainable aspirations, tormented by unspeakable disappointments; the hero of marvellous noble deeds, successively the incarnation of Sorrow, of Revolt, of Doubt and of Action. It is thus that he is represented in Childe Harold, the disdainful and melancholy exile from the society of men; in Manfred, that new Faust master of the elements, of life, of death

even, yet the miserable victim of his own reflection; in Cain, the tragic outlaw; in Lara, in Conrad, the corsair of fantastic exploits and mysterious destiny. All these personages, in whom fanciful and real grandeur are strangely blended, only present the most studied and theatrical reflection of the soul of the poet.

But side by side with this Byron of the foot-lights is another more natural Byron exactly its opposite, made up of whims, faults, and rare qualities, tormented by morbid sensitiveness and dominated by contrary and inordinate passions: a pride uncommon even among great men, which had made him as a child burst into tears when first he heard himself addressed as 'Lord'; the ambition to play a prominent part in the world and get himself talked about; an implacable hatred against any who had wounded his self-esteem; yet withal generosity, sincere pity for the oppressed, charitable eagerness to help persons in distress, abomination of lying and tyranny, deep affection for his friends and his daughter; above all, a craving for love that was half sensual and half mystic, by turns tender and violent, chaste and voluptuous.

The soul of Byron was as restive as it was passionate, incapable of conforming to rule or submitting to the restraint of conventions and laws; versatile and contradictory, it now affects impiety and immorality, now cries out upon licentiousness and protests respect for religion; at once demonstrative and reserved, simple and haughty; passing from familiarity to declamation; giving to the body it animated -- to use the expression of the poet Moore -- 'all shapes, from Jove down to Scapin'.

This passionate and complex temperament was distorted by the ex-

periences of life. Lame as the result of an accident which followed close upon his birth, Byron never ceased to brood over his infirmity. Having lost his father at an early age, he was reared by a mother whose disposition was so at variance with his, that one day each suspected the other of an attempt at poisoning. Later came pecuniary embarrassments, affronts to his self-esteem, complete ostracism from the aristocratic society where he belonged and where he had no friends, a humiliating entrance into the House of Lords, unfortunate love-affairs, literary rebuffs, and an unhappy marriage which caused him, aside from more intimate considerations, the bitter hostility of his countrymen, and which forced him to exile himself from his country. The malignant fatality that pursued him during his childhood, and that before his birth lowered over his race, did not relax its hold upon him even when he sought a new life in foreign lands. Victim of his heritage, of himself, of circumstances, of the 'cant' of his fellow-citizens, Byron was never free from suffering. Between his character and aspirations on the one hand, and on the other the wretchedness of his life, there was continual strife, the result of which was to embitter him and exaggerate his tendency to show himself worse than he was, to transmute his hatred of sham virtue into a defiant affectation of vice, his independence of spirit into scepticism, his need of love into licentiousness, and his pride in his birth and his realization of his genius into self-glorification.

This is the Byron, a multiform and elusive being, that is painted, more or less consciously, in Don Juan. This hero is not, like those that have gone before, the reflection of a chimera; it

is the portrait of a real and very complex creature. He has, indeed, preserved something of the dread seducer, of the voluptuous and blasé Childe Harold, of the magnanimous victor, of Conrad, the rescuer of women in cities taken by assault, of the sceptical Cain. But passing into him these conventional personages have acquired more human traits, and have lost much of their ^{unreality} ~~reality~~. Don Juan is a synthesis of all Byron's different states of mind, his dreams, his humanitarianism, his disillusionments, his sorrows, and his hates. In the person of Don Juan the poet opens his heart and eases its burden; at first he is all enthusiasm, infatuated with liberty and love, simple and true, sad and tender; then disgusted, bitter, and unjust.

This is the Byron of the pamphlets on Pope, on the British Review and Blackwood's Magazine, as well as the author of Manfred and The Giaour; the generous Byron zealous for the independence of other nations and exasperated by the injustice of his own; Byron the inconstant husband and lover; and Byron the tender father; Byron the braggart of vice and impiety, enemy of man and God, and Byron the idealist, the humane, suffering that he can not realize his dream of justice. Do but closely examine this man of contradictions -- exalted by some, defamed by others, known to most only through the blasphemy of Cain and the melancholy disdain of Childe Harold -- and then find him, in his entirety, in Don Juan.

This poem is the commentary of his life and thought, the sincere expression of the feelings he experienced when he consented to remain himself, when he was in the midst of his friends and was not parading before the public. Oftentimes one here finds unaffected

and undeclamatory expression of the grief of which Moore, Shelley, and the Countess Guiccioli give frequent testimony: here are disgust with the joys of love, renunciation of all ambition, sadness at feeling his heart grow old before his body; here are melancholy reflections on the vanity of human happiness, on the shortness of human life, and the disappearance of everything under the pitiless scythe of Time :

The very generations of the dead

Are swept away, and tomb inherits tomb,

Until the memory of an Age is fled,

And, buried, sinks beneath its offspring's doom:--

iv:102.

There are still bitter allusions to betrayed affections and friends of happy days who

fall off

As they will do like leaves at the first

breeze:--xiv:48.

The note of candor rings true. But is the poet the dupe of his sorrow, and does he exaggerate the cruelty of his wrongs ? That is possible. Yet even so, the individual heart is the only measure of human suffering. And here is nothing of the courted disillusionment, the artistic despair, the affectation of agony unwarranted by injury, all brought into vogue by the Romantic School. Not, to be sure, that in Childe Harold and Manfred Byron has not celebrated imaginary sorrows. But as opposed to these poems, in which he has merely expressed vague melancholy and depression at being unable to attain an unattainable ideal, into Don Juan Byron has put the al-

most exact record of the sorrows that darkened his life, and no longer the mere reflection of his imagination, on reality. A real sadness permeates this poem written under the burden of the past and in the restless surge of the present.

The poem also expresses, and to no lesser degree, inborn impulses of goodness and generosity which weariness and pride never wiped out from the heart of Byron. With bitterness he continually mingles an indignation that is often only the impassioned utterance of love, as well as a saddened compassion for human folly and wickedness. The melancholy stanzas in which he exalts the hero of Cervantes, that dreamer carried away by the noble ideal of redressing wrongs confounding the wicked, and delivering the oppressed -- do they not attest the philanthropy of the poet, indignant at seeing devotion to humanity and sacrifice to noble causes eternally taxed with folly? And if there is any difference in emphasis, is there not even more sincerity in the tones in which he sings his love of liberty and the heroes who consecrated their lives to it, his hope of one day seeing the people throw off the 'harness' they wear, his pity for the weak, and hatred of the tyrants who provoke so many inflammatory lines? What sadness beneath the irony is stirred in him by the spectacle of the horrors of war! If he complaisantly describes its blackest side, if he ^{picks} ~~picks~~ out certain horrible episodes, he does so less in search of the picturesque, in eagerness to draw a brilliant picture, than in hope of arousing men to wrath.

Likewise, under the violence of his attacks on hypocrisy and moral prejudices appears his ardent love of freedom; under his affectation of scepticism a certain honesty, if not absolute religious

and philosophic conviction. Time and time again he returns to his beliefs. These, it is true, as is always the case with minds that can not be confined within a system, are fluctuating and contradictory; he admits no definite dogma and does not believe in a God such as the different religions have conceived, although the supposition of a Being seems to him more natural than a 'fortuitous concourse of atoms.' He professes a sort of pantheism where poetry, admiration of nature, and a vague mysticism unite to satisfy his instinctive need of love:

My altars are the mountains and the Ocean
Earth -- air -- stars,--all that springs from the
great Whole,

Who hath produced, and will receive the Soul.--iii:104.

Somewhere else he attempts to explain the mystery of death; he analyzes it, but confesses his powerlessness to understand it and come to any conclusions. In general, he declares himself unable to make up his mind in the face of the multiplicity of religious dogmas and philosophical systems, which are mutually destructive:

One system eats another up, and this

Much as old Saturn ate his progeny;...--xiv:1.

At the same time, like many unbelievers, he is not free from superstition; the mysterious fascinates him, and he succumbs to it in its most childish manifestations: he is afraid of horoscopes, presentiments, unlucky days, returning spirits and spectres! --

I say, I do believe a haunted spot

Exists --

--xv:26.

Dark and high-ceilinged rooms, ancient portraits hung on the walls,

embers dying on the hearth, and outside the moping cry of the owl make him shudder at night in his manor at Newstead, just as the child Chateaubriand trembled in the murky rooms of the Chateau de Combourg.

Among these views on philosophy and morality and these supernatural beliefs, he intersperses, quite without transition and merely as the fancy strikes him, his opinions on literary and artistic matters: he displays a catholic taste which delights in the 'ocean lights' of Vernet, the beautiful landscapes of Claude Lorraine, the sombre coloring of Rembrandt, the severe outlines of Caravaggio, the grace of Albano, and the sparkle of Teniers. In music, despite his admiration for Rossini, he derides the insipid sentimentality of the Italians, and expresses preference for the more virile strains of the North, for the national ballads of Scotland and Ireland, which fire the imagination of their listeners and make them dream of visionary fatherlands. In literature he is predisposed to take up the defense of writers under the ban of public opinion for the immorality of their works, of erotic poets, and those who, like Dryden, breathed in their poetry their hatred of humanity.

Don Juan, then, is not only a moral confession, but is a sort of auto-psychology which reveals a temperament primarily sensitive and impulsive, prone to infatuation and every form of enthusiasm.

But side by side with this second personality, the natural and spontaneous Byron, the poem presents yet another -- the Byron as modified by his life and his imagination, who never wearies of perverting his own natural disposition and maligning humanity. In Don Juan more than in his other works he is to be found in his rôle

of impugning the most disinterested motives and the most generous ideals, of scoffing at laws, religion, and family life; and on the other hand affecting to glorify evil and defend all irregularity of thought and conduct. Like all who have had to suffer from human conventions, Byron sees in them, and reflects in his works, only the false; because he was the victim of possibly over-nice moral scruples, virtue appears to him as only a mask of vice; by a reaction against moral standards, he becomes the apostle of immorality. In spite of whatever artificiality there may be in this side of his work, it is none the less a faithful analysis of his personality, and as such is an indispensable document for whoso would know the heart and full thought of Byron.

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But the poem is something even more than an autobiography and a confession. It has a higher and more general import: it is a satire on humanity. This satire was in fact, in Byron's opinion, the real object of his work. It is only through force of habit and because of his temperament that he continually introduces his own personality into this portrayal of society. 'I meant', he said in his letter to Murray of February 21, 1821, 'to have made him a cavalier servente in Italy, and a cause for divorce in England, and a sentimental Werther-faced man in Germany, so as to show the different ridicules of the societies in each of those countries, and to have displayed him gradually gaté and blasé as he grew older, as is natural'. Somewhere else (letter to Murray, December 25, 1822) he further said that Don Juan was 'a Satire on abuses of the present

states of Society, and not an eulogy of vice.'

This satire is many-sided: individual, human, and social; European, yet distinctly English. Don Juan is the epitome of the most sombre observations that have been made on man in general, on his ideas and customs, his inventions and his genius, not only at a specific time in one certain country, but in all times and in all lands. The poet lays bare the human animal, both as an individual and in his relations with his fellow-beings. He exposes the weaknesses and vices inherent in his nature as well as the perversions and lies induced by civilization and social intercourse.

However, it must be observed that Byron, aristocrat though he was by birth and tastes, having barely existed among people he did not understand, vents his hottest wrath upon the aristocracy. He had another reason for this: his misanthropy is founded less upon an objective hatred of wrong than upon personal grievances. He cherishes a grudge against society for his own misfortunes; now this society is not the great anonymous crowd: it is only a small circle, the minority of the people of the world.

The portion of this World which I at present

Have taken up to fill the following sermon,

Is one of which there's no description recent:--xiv:15.

And the 'reason why is easy to determine', he adds, because in this society all is mockery; there is nothing profound and sincere, but rather

A sort of varnish over every fault;--xiv:16.

it smothers even crime in commonplaceness; its passions are factitious, its 'wit without much salt', and its characters dulled by a

'smooth monotony'. It is, then, the man whom rank and education have raised above the vulgar, the man of the ruling classes, that the poet has attempted to portray.

And yet the portrait is less individual than he intended it to be. Byron had too much genius not to represent, under the faults and foibles of a class, ^{the eternal man} with the attributes that cling to him unchanged in all conditions of society. The portrait he makes of him is worthy of Pascal, with these differences: he leans rather to the Pyrronists² than to the Dogmatics, and the human creature appears to him in the form of the 'Beast' rather than of the 'Angel'. 'S'il s'élève, je l'abaisse', he could say with the author of the Pensées, but without adding, 'S'il s'abaisse, je l'élève.' The rôle assumed by Byron is evidently to humiliate man, to jeer at his heart, and scoff at his genius. In his eyes he is a creature composed of egotistic and vicious instincts, brutal passions, weakness, wickedness, cowardice, and envy; he is a creature who sets himself to corrupt the rare qualities implanted by nature, infecting all things with the baseness of his thoughts upon them, incapable of conceiving of any high thing without immediately contaminating it, any useful thing without turning it to evil purpose; unable to construct any thing that will endure and prosper; a silly clown and mischief-maker who would provoke laughter did he not oftener draw tears. He swells with pride at the advances he has made in the arts and sciences; yet his most glorious discoveries he devotes to his own destruction: he uses powder to kill his fellow men; he cures one disease only to make way for another; he discovers new worlds

and goes rummaging the bowels of the earth; yet these daring enterprises bring him only new modes of meeting death. The intelligence on which he so prides himself consists of nothing substantial: time reduces his most wonderful inventions to nothingness;

Would pique himself on intellects, ^{who} whose use

Depends so much upon the gastric juice?--vi:38.

In reality man is a blind creature in the universe, and his only knowledge is, to echo Socrates,

To know that nothing can be known.--vii:5.

If his intelligence is of a low order, the emotions he fondly professes are no less vain. The poet analyzes his heart and exposes its secret faults; he strips the 'grandes passions' of their showy garb, to point the finger at their deformities. Love is only the source of fleeting and deceptive joys; it ends either with marriage -- that is, with aversion or resignation -- or with adultery -- that is, with suspicions, lies, or worse catastrophes.

'Oh Love!' cries the poet, 'thou art the very god of evil.' Friendship is a mask for self-interest and egotism, the subtle pleasure of hearing in confidence the misfortunes of another, giving advice, and taxing him with his blunders. Love of glory is for some only the prospect of pillage or the means to a pension in old age; for others the desire for the fame that leaves behind only

A name, a wretched picture and worse bust.--i:218.

-- or nothing. Courage is only the blare of the trumpet, the blustering heroism of drunkenness which makes man a ferocious beast. And so it is with all the emotions exalted by the moralists: love of the beautiful and the good, devotion, charity -- these are seldom sin-

cere; faith is only the fear of death, religion only hypocrisy or bigotry, modesty only a false prudery:

"Wherefore the ravishing did not begin!"--viii:132.

was the demand of some matrons captured at the fall of Ismail, made impatient by long widowhood. Everywhere it is the evil passions in control -- intolerance, ambition, and avarice.

Man's opinions are equally worthless: prejudices and second-hand ideas dominate him; he does not think for himself. His judgments are vitiated by his interests, his environment -- by the mere pleasure of passing a clever remark. The least foolish, those who think and write, authors and poets, cater to the public taste and supply it with the conventional morality which it demands, to hide its vices with a gloss of puritanism. As for those whose genius expresses itself untrammelled by convention -- they are repudiated by humanity.

Customs and institutions are in a yet worse plight: from birth a man is deformed by the education he receives; his instincts are repressed; truths are hidden from him; he is taught only a science of words, a virtue of conventions, all in strait dogmas and formulas. When real life opens before him, ill-prepared to confront it, he enters upon it with misgivings. He carries over into it his habit of substituting prejudices, ready-made ideas, and lies for realities. Or often, as happens with Don Juan, his ignorance leads him into the most unfortunate blunders. The same restraints harass the mature man. Customs and laws bind him, torture him, goad him to revolt, or else gently lead him into hypocrisy, and make him

thoroughly wretched. Family life breeds dissention and bitterness-- rebellious and ungrateful children, harsh parents, and uncongenial husbands and wives.

As for social relationships, they are perverted by the constant aim of every man to make a fool of every other man. And the justice that pretends to regulate them in reality aggravates the evil: judges, lawyers, and business men obscure the truth; these are the 'moral chimney-sweepers', whose 'legal broom' is covered with 'endless soot'. Man is, in short, a poor creature incapable of noble thought or ~~action~~^{deed}; the only passions that actuate him are 'Glory, the Grape, Love, [and] Gold'. These sum up his every desire.

Without their sap, how branchless were the trunk

Of Life's strange tree, so fruitful on

occasion! -- 11:179.

Into this general satire on mankind, the poet has woven a more particular satire -- that of the different nations of Europe in the nineteenth century. At the time when Byron wrote Don Juan, Europe was passing through a moral and political crisis which sheds light upon certain aspects of the poem. The fearful upheaval caused the old world by the French Revolution seemed to have subsided; the tottering thrones had regained their stability; the mighty force that for a moment had stirred the nations to their depths and borne them in the direction of liberty, was spent. Tyranny again reigned triumphant; liberty was profaned; all the fiery aspirations that had ennobled humanity were quenched, and only an occasional stirring proved that the flame once kindled on the fane was not really extinct, and was but awaiting a favoring breeze to burst forth again: Romagna

was struggling to throw off the Austrian yoke; Greece was in a state of uprising; secret societies were forming. These movements, however, only meant that the yoke of the kings grew heavier; and this victory of despotism filled the poet with pity for the enslaved masses and fury against tyrants of all sorts -- kings and grandees, the noble and the rich, priests and soldiers, who were severally responsible for the general state of subjection. To him Waterloo was a fatal day, when liberty went to the wall. And Wellington, the conqueror of Napoleon, he takes as a favorite target. In the repeated blows he deals him there is indeed beyond doubt a malicious desire to cast a slur upon the national hero, that object of the veneration of his compatriots, and an ill-disguised admiration for the genius of the conquered foe; perhaps there is also some resentment against the soldier that turns public attention to good account. But above all there is an honest anger against the general who has 'repair'd Legitimacy's crutch'. He continues;

You might have freed fallen Europe from the
unity

Of Tyrants, and been blessed from shore to
shore:

And now -- what is your fame ? -----

Go! hear it in your famished country's cries!

Behold the World! and curse your victories! -- ix:9

He takes pleasure in belittling him and denying his ability. He maintains that he was conquered at Waterloo. He sees in him only

a conceited dolt whose whole glory consists in Orders and pensions.

After the Iron Duke, the man against whom he has the greatest grievance is George IV. He never loses sight of the fact that this prince made England the champion of tyranny abroad, and at home stifled liberty and starved his own subjects.

But this revolt of Byron against those who have retarded the progress of Europe is not confined to an individual satire. It bursts forth at every turn in pessimistic, ironical, or indignant observations on a corrupt and self-centred aristocracy dead to generous impulses, and a social system still dominated by war, the ravages of despotism, the exactions of kings, the thirst for preferment, and the lies of laws, institutions, and beliefs.

Byron intended, as we have seen, to make a panorama of this universal corruption in the states of Europe, sending his hero through each of them in turn. He has carried out only one part of his program: Don Juan, born in Spain, lives for a while in the islands of Greece, in Turkey, in Russia, and in England; he travels only in Central Europe, and does not even stop in France. So the panorama remains incomplete; and it must be admitted that except in the case of England the outlines are vaguely sketched by an uncertain hand. The writer has depicted only what he has learned from the cursory observation of a tourist, and what he has gathered from his reading. He has gained no insight into the intimate life, the essential and significant characteristics, and the special forms that the passions, weaknesses, and vices common to humanity take in each country, as modified by different climates, laws, beliefs, and races. His portrayal shows only certain obvious manifestations of

the national character. In Spain he noted the bigotry of a rigidly formal Catholicism and the sensuality of the women; in Turkey the mysterious dramas of the seraglio, the houris and eunuchs -- a picturesqueness worn out now and conventional; in Russia the despotism of the tzars and the servility of the nobles, all this being seen from the outside, in passing by, without inquiry into the causes, and without study of the phenomena through which the individuality of a people finds expression. As a result, the satire on the nations of Europe is throughout the vaguest and most tedious part of the whole poem. Byron is attacking what he has seen, which is merely the inaccurate and entirely superficial image of the reality into which he has not entered.

Quite otherwise is the satire on English life. Here Byron is on familiar ground, in his own sphere. He does not stop at what catches the eye of the astonished stranger, at a passing phase or superficial peculiarity. He bares the very soul of the nation and reveals its inmost recesses. The satire directly turns into a pamphlet; and for this reason one must be on guard not to take literally a critic prompted much less by disinterested championship of morality than by personal ^{grievances} ~~grievs~~. Let the reader consult the reply (*Memoires*, vol. ii, p. 205---) he addressed to the Remarks on Don Juan which appeared in Blackwood's Magazine (Aug. 1819, vol. v, p. 512), and there find, both in the tone and in the enumeration of the injustices of which he believed himself the victim, the vehemence of his resentment.

There was, moreover, a natural misunderstanding between Byron and the English people. To these rigid observers of family obli-

gations, social conventions, and dignified bearing and deportment. he presented the spectacle of a life deliberately freed from all restraints of family and society. This discord aggravated the poet's habitual tendency to set public opinion at defiance. The English satire reveals an obvious desire to offend the sentiments particularly dear to puritan souls by exalting irregularity of life and independence of thought and conduct, and railing at virtue, religion, and respectability, the very institutions the pride of every good Englishman.

Byron unbosoms his wrath with a certain exultation. He delights in humiliating his compatriots, in making them fall from their pedestal before the eyes of all Europe. Knowing them so well, he knew what charges would most deeply wound their self-esteem. He aims his thrusts exactly where they believe themselves invulnerable, and so must suffer the more at being touched. Armed with his 'besom' the poet goes about to 'brush a web or two off the walls' of the halls of his fellow citizens. The national failing is 'cant'. The criteria of morality are 'appearances': There is a tendency to attach shame less to the offense than to the scandal caused by it, and to give evil the air of imposing dignity. The opposite of hypocrisy, which lowers the eyes and bows lowly, 'cant' takes a bold course and faces you squarely, with head high; it robs virtue of her plume and with it decorates vice. It is the booth that conceals the worst wares: under its folds lurk intolerance, shamelessness, avarice, brutality. It envelopes all things in a toil of lies, and by this means England deceives all other nations. This is the ugly secret that Byron exposes to view.

He represents it from the beginning under a symbolic and humorous form that makes it particularly effective. When the stranger arrives in London by way of Dover, he climbs Shooter's Hill. From its height there suddenly bursts upon him the spectacle of the mighty capital, which spreads out at his feet the thousands of chimneys of its manufacturing plants and the countless masts of its vessels. At the moment the city seems to him the furnace of an alchemist, whence comes the riches of the world. He gazes upon this queen of industry and commerce, and through the smoke that obscures it, perceives with beating heart the abode of liberty and personal security, the sanctuary of law, justice, and chastity, the temple of comfort and well-being.

"And here", he cried, "is Freedom's chosen station;

Here peals the People's voice, nor can entomb it
Racks -- prisons -- inquisitions;-----

"Here are chaste wives, pure lives; here people pay

But what they please; -----

Here laws are all inviolate -- none lay

Traps for the traveller -- ... " --xi:9 and 10.

And full of enthusiasm he is advancing, when suddenly a knife gleams before his eyes, and four rogues in ambush demand his 'money or his life'. But even should he save both of these, the stranger will not escape the customs-officers and hotel-keepers, those experts in the art of robbery. And little by little he will discover the real England as he has discovered the real London, no longer the city of splendor and opulence, but the city of fog, mud, and misery. Under

this show of freedom and prosperity that deceives the world he will see the ancient virtues in death-agony, and the former glory wasting. He will see liberty enchained, the laws trampled underfoot, the government unprogressive and tyrannical, the House of Commons converted into a 'tax-trap'.

the people ridden o'er like sand

By slaves on horseback ---

--xi:85.

and unable to strike back, small landholders and country squires restless and dissatisfied, the 'ministers and underlings' the only ones that profit by the taxes and ~~bat~~^{batten} on the public moneys.

Thus a society which has exaggerated in its outward manifestations the severity of puritanism has, in reality, only brought to perfection the art of concealing vice under a solemn and tedious decorum. The reign of George IV has become the reign of 'cant'. This cant infects ~~every~~^{everything} thing: it is in the greed of the avaricious, in the purism of language, and the corruption of morals; in the prudery of women whose conquest is slow, but full of surprises to the conqueror; in the clamors of society against sincere passions, and its indulgent complicity in discreet love-affairs; in the lucrative virtue of critics and moralists, and the pedantry of bluestockings.

Inflamed with malice, Byron pilots his hero about in the country of false pretences and exposes its every side. He shows the emptiness and arrogance of the drawing-rooms, with their ~~scheming~~^{scheming}, their gossip, and their slander, the intrigues of lovers, the coquetry of women who promise and fail their promises, the stratagems of fortune-hunters, the dangerous diplomacy of marriageable daughters and mothers of families -- all a confusion of pride, caprice and fashion.

and also that special trafficking which in London constitutes the art of love. After the romantic and passionate love of the southland, Don Juan experiences in England a half-pedantic, half-commercial love which terminates in blackmail and substitutes damages for the jealous sword of lover or husband.

Leaving the salons, there are luncheons, dinners, and all the dull and exhausting life of people of fashion, young without youth -- gambling and dissipating, smothered in debt; and when these have

voted, dined, drank, gamed and
whored,

The family vault receives another lord. -- xi:74.

There is also the life of the country-seat, with its heterogeneous assemblage of great noblemen, fashionable poets, wits, magistrates, fine ladies, bluestockings, and coquettes, some pompous and tedious, discussing affairs of state with grave banality, others 'flirting' decently enough during the day and arranging secret interviews by night; some watching a chance for a witticism, others slandering and moralizing.

The satire is here picturesque rather than profound; there is more malice in its tone than bitterness: the poet indulges in the sport of flaying his victim with a laugh. He paints a whole gallery of original types, townspeople and country-folk, with the confidence of a man familiar with rural conditions. Here is the lord of the manor, the condescending protector of the squires and farmers of the place, prodigal of his fortune and his courtesies;

influential and jealous of his influence; friend of 'freedom' and 'the Government'; defender of law and order -- and incidentally of his own offices and sinecures. About his table crowd ruddy-faced countrymen, huge eaters and joyous drinkers, clergymen,

massy members of the church

Takers of tithes, and makers of good matches,----xvi:80. self-important squires with their decorous wives, all a stiff and supersensitive crowd, uncompromising on questions of their rights, otherwise frivolous and tiresome.

Byron has here represented a heavy and egotistical class stifled in its traditions and prejudices, stubbornly clinging to ancient privileges, hostile to all innovation and liberal reform, with no pity for the miseries of the people and no insight into the needs and aspirations of modern society.

On the outskirts of this narrowly conservative class live the men of letters; these reflect the morale of the country. Their works are well-meaning and tedious; they are always preaching, whether in verse or prose.

And Pegasus hath a psalmodic amble. -- xi:57.

To their moral code with its smack of the pulpit they add the interminable descriptions and pedlar nonsense which have replaced in public favor the virile beauties of Pope and Dryden. These gibes of Byron, justified when aimed at the drivellings of a Southey, are in general unjust to the Lake Poets, because of the scrupulous and sober truth of their poetry and their discreet sensibility with its magic of giving life to the humblest creatures of the universe. Doubtless the tormented spirit of the author of Manfred could not

appreciate the delicate art with which Wordsworth paints a flower of the fields and makes it live before us, or the truth and fancy so gracefully blended in the poems where Coleridge describes the ruins of ^{ancient} old manors and calls back to life heroes of old. The admirer of Pope and Milton would naturally be insensible to such simple and delicate grace. In the pamphlet written in reply to the reviews in Blackwood's Magazine he said *that the true cause of the deplorable state of contemporary English poetry was to be imputed to the absurd and systematic depreciation of Pope.*

But in his strictures there is something else besides a natural antipathy of taste. The acrimony of tone betrays the slighted poet's jealousy of his rivals secure in public favor. The satire assails individuals rather than ideas and systems.

Such is unquestionably the conclusion to which one is forced who will consider in its entirety the significance of this exhaustive pamphlet, the Don Juan of Byron: as was his habit, the poet has so entangled all that pertains to his own person and his own life with the general ideas he is setting forth, that the work loses all objective importance. His judgments are always blinded and distorted by private considerations. Even while the satire is the echo of human miseries, it is such only to the degree in which the poet himself has suffered: it is himself he pities, in pitying mankind; and he is not so much giving voice to the demands of the masses as he is giving vent to his own spleen. When he arraigns the puritanical and bookish education of the English youth, he draws

chiefly upon recollections of his own childhood. When he lashes 'cant' and the world's severity toward domestic infidelity, and exposes the hypocrisy of family life, he is incited chiefly by ever-fresh resentment against the English aristocracy for the injustice done him personally. A general satire, a succession of tableaux in which Europe and Humanity file before us -- Don Juan is all that, and that above everything else, but only inasmuch as it is the reflection of the intimate experiences of the poet.

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The very tone of the work betrays its subjective character; it is never cold nor indifferent, but always impassioned, and the passion is conveyed in words by turn violent, sorrowful, and sarcastic. Sometimes tears lurk beneath the irony:

And if I laugh at any mortal thing,

'Tis that I may not weep;---

--iv:4.

His gaiety is a sham. He realizes it, and says by way of apology:

When we know what all are, we must bewail us,

But ne'ertheless I hope it is no crime

To laugh at all things -- for I wish to know

What, after all, are all things -- but a show! --vii:2.

Like all great satirists, like all who have sounded the human heart and run the ^{gamut} ~~gauntlet~~ of experience, Byron is more alive to the universal sadness that emanates from life and the tragedies that life contains, than to the surface comedies and amusing aspects. If his raillery has much of the wit of Swift, it has still more of the acrimony.

The poem is also exceptional for the skill with which objects of ridicule are thrown into relief by the unexpected play between the grotesque and the serious. By the sudden introduction of a mocking jest, the gravity of a scene is destroyed, and a tragic situation reduced to the proportions of a burlesque. The same is true of the sentiments expressed : a word, a facetious detail, a reference to petty physical discomforts, in the middle of a passionate outburst of feeling, and man's dignity becomes a thing absurd. For instance, Don Juan on the vessel that bears him away is addressing tender farewells to his last mistress, when at the very instant he cries in an agony of grief,

A mind diseased no remedy can physic -- --ii:19.
a lurch of the vessel suddenly nauseates him.

Oh, Julia! what is every other woe? -- --ii:20.
he pursues, and then, as his seasickness increases,

For God's sake let me have a glass of liquor; --ii:20.
The scene continues after this fashion, the poet amusing himself interspersing his hero's love ecstasies with stomach cramps. But on closer scrutiny we find it a sorry pleasantry. What more pitiable creature than this whose most pathetic utterances can be cut short by an attack of nausea! Has human pride ever been more cruelly humbled and derided? Have man's grotesque vanity and miserable weakness ever been more maliciously exploited? Is not the episode reminiscent of the grave judge described by Pascal 'who governs himself by pure and sublime reason', and who at a sermon to which he has gone in a most devout frame of mind, suddenly

loses his gravity because the preacher is hoarse or ill-shaven ?

Byron loves this trick of belittling and gibing at his fellow men; he casts about for these witty but disturbing antitheses of sober moral sentiments and vulgar physical annoyances, these unexpected associations of opposite phenomena, the contrast of which, even while it draws a laugh, starts a train of skeptical reflections on the dignity of the 'lord of creation'. Never is Byron's laugh so bitter as in these witticisms : he describes the terrors of the shipwrecked sailors, and some get drunk while others pray: for

There's nought, no doubt, so much the spirit calms

As rum and true religion: ---

--11:34.

Here again all the virtue of the irony depends upon the juxtaposition of the two opposing phenomena, the one moral and noble, the other grossly physical, both called into play by the same circumstances and ending in the same result. Again, when a lifeboat is about to be swallowed up with its load of nine men and ship's provisions, the survivors bid sad farewell to their companions -- and also to the casks of biscuit and butter. With the groans of the dying and the moaning of the poor wretches tortured by hunger, with this pathetic description which was to inspire the sombre brush of Delacroix, are thrown in flippant jests on Don Juan's repugnance to eating a piece of his tutor, and on the prudent considerations which restrain the sailors from tasting the succulent but contaminated flesh of the master's mate. The noble ode on the aspirations of Greece to liberty, vibrant with patriotism though it is, is only the production of a poet-rhetorician who associates the heroes of Thermopylae with the

girls of Samos, Anacreon with Leonidas. Throughout the poem we find just such antitheses throwing the most serious matters into ridicule: the glory Iliad owes Homer is commensurate with that Moyle gave the game of whist. The mightiest men are belittled by the mention of a petty detail: Milton, that prince of poets, was flogged at college; Shakespeare was a poacher; Bacon accepted bribes.

Scenes of appealing tenderness are followed by comic sketches: from that charming description of the love of Haidée we are hurried into a masquerade in a seraglio. Sometimes the same effect is produced merely by a play on words, as in the following stanza:

Whether it was their engineer's stupidity,
Their haste or waste I neither know nor care,
Or some contractor's personal cupidity,
Saving his soul by cheating in the ware
Of homicide, but there was no solidity
In the new batteries erected there;
They either missed, or they were never missed,
And added greatly to the missing list.

--vii:27.

Irony of this sort is by no means innocuous, and the least severe of the contemporary critics of the poet did not fail to point out the dangers of it. The method of procedure is one of the most insidious for bringing virtue into disrepute; for in order to establish the fact that the noblest sentiments are only illusion and dupery -- that love, patriotism, courage, and piety are only instruments of deception, falsehood, and crime -- Byron blocks in his picture with strokes so alluring that one would think him the most enthusiastic

of their devotees, until he suddenly bares the undercurrent of his thought by a sarcasm, a play on words, or a frivolous detail. Every passion of the human heart is exalted only to be plunged as deep again into ridicule. And by this use of this device, Byron establishes his relationship with that school of writers at times vehement, at times humorous, but always misanthropic, who from Casooigne and Joseph Hall down to Shelley, and between these Ben Jonson, Dryden, Pope, Swift, and so many others, have given English literature, even in its lighter veins, the severity and sombreness that is its distinctive feature.

So it is that the impression left by Byron's poem is one of very positive scepticism and pessimism. Unable to settle his own beliefs, forever renouncing his hope of possessing the happiness that he had blindly pursued over all Europe, that he had asked in vain of ambition, love, friendship, and poetry; impotent witness of the defeat of liberalism and of the reaction that succeeded it, Byron had come to the bitter conviction that virtue was a failure and man powerless to realize any political or moral advancement. This disillusionment sprung from the ruin of the poet's ideal; and the fact that his was an exalted ideal made the chagrin and despair that followed the more profound and hopeless. As a result of having expected too much of man and demanded too much of life, Byron has too greatly undervalued and denounced them both.

This he did at first with the somewhat naïve passion of a young man whose dreams have been rudely shattered: Childe Harold was the

most vehement expression of this state of mind. The tone thereafter becomes calmer; with the poet's prolonged contact with reality the indignant outbursts abate, to yield place to mockery, while the once declamatory reproaches become caustic. This second phase produced Don Juan. Don Juan is a Childe Harold matured by experience, who will no longer stoop to indignation against his fellow men. Childe Harold cannot forgive humanity for having destroyed his dream, and against it hurls every anathema. The more sceptical Don Juan adopts the expedient of playing with life that he may not suffer by it. He knows men and knows what he may reasonably expect of them; he makes no inquiry into their virtues and amuses himself with their vices.

He does not, however, arrive all at once at this philosophical dilettantism. He is matured by his experiences, transformed in the course of events and in the countries through which he travels. The impetuous youth he was at the beginning becomes in the end the calm, prudent man, master of his fate; but this evolution comes about gradually, by several stages.

Don Juan is at first merely a child who has inherited the ardent temperament of his race; like the hero of the Spanish legend, he is a Sevillian and of Gothic blood. This little curly-head is, to begin with, an arrant 'good-for-nothing' -- 'a mischief-making monkey from his birth' -- warm of heart, quick of understanding, and in general an exemplary youth of no evil tendencies. At the age of fifteen his erstwhile dormant senses experience a sudden awakening. His age, his temperament, the climate, and the occasion all unite to reveal to Don Juan the mystery of love. His discovery, unsullied by the shame that often accompanies the first initiation, is made

almost chastely. His heart is his guide, and he himself does not know where it is to lead him. Nature calls, and he seeks whence comes the voice that speaks to him. Fearful, apprehensive, he flees into the lonely woods to escape the mysterious evil that torments him. Then follow sighs, blushes, furtive glances, all the emotions and all the perplexities that love causes an awakening heart. Don Juan's opens like the soul of a virgin, ignorant of itself and of the reasons for its distress. But when he has once tasted of the tree of knowledge, he madly bites into its fruit. His love is that of a vigorous, sensual creature accomplishing its function. Under the force of instinct "il nage sans malice dans la volupté". He is a 'broth of a boy' breaking all restraints. The repressed scholar fed on sage precepts, saturated with morality and religion, henceforth drinks in pleasure as the escaped colt drinks in the freedom of the open air. At first he thinks he loves the woman who initiated him into the mysteries of love. But it is not one woman he loves; it is Woman. Scarcely has he been torn from Julia when he finds consolation in the arms of Raidee. This proves no ingratitude or faithlessness on his part, nor search after new pleasures; it is passion frankly revealing itself, as a child innocently exposes its nakedness.

This is the first state of mind of the hero, the first phase of his evolution. He is the youth in whom nature finds full expression, the creature of instincts, rather naïve and tender, as yet ~~unscathed~~ ^{unseared} by life and uncorrupted by men. But his first adventures, the barbarity of conventions that pitilessly separate creatures made for each other, the misfortunes that overwhelm him, and the first

contact with evil all combine to give Don Juan a sense of reality, to calm his temperament, and mature his character. Already on the boat that bears him a captive far from his mistress he has made the acquaintance of an Englishman, a prisoner like himself and an older man more accustomed to the caprices of fortune. The conversation of this companion, his sang-froid and indifference, teach the young hero to put a juster estimate upon the value of men and things, to calm his passion and suffer less keenly from his disillusionment. Better informed though he is of the nature and instability of human emotions, Don Juan does not, however, all at once curb his spontaneity and cool the passion of his hates and enthusiasms. In the seraglio of the Sultan he entertains misgivings and scruples which do more credit to his honesty than to his discretion; before the walls of Ismail he acquits himself with a still youthful impetuosity and generosity. But at the Russian court, where he next sojourns, intrigues in which he is involved and contact with the passions that breed in such an atmosphere, gradually train him in the habits of self-control and obedience to the dictates of his will rather than to the promptings of his heart.

And so henceforth he stands cured of his first enthusiasms and illusions. The young man who had lived only for love has become susceptible to ambition; he seeks favor with those in power, and looks to his fortune. His liaison with Catherine has little in common with the veritable intoxication of a year since; this is a skillfully handled love rather than a sentimental; its stakes are preferences more than sensual pleasures; it is almost a businesslike love, from which the hero seeks rest in other diversions, where he loses

yet more of his ideals and somewhat of his virtue. He becomes more egotistical and more reserved, and leaves Russia with the knowledge of how to control and how conduct himself; he has learned to adapt himself to circumstances and persons, and to be the dupe of no man, either himself or another.

England is to complete his transformation. In this realm of materialism and hypocrisy Don Juan perfects himself in the art of handling his fellow men; he learns to participate without mishap in the conflict of interests and passions, to know human foibles and turn them to good account. The world with its thousand pitfalls and intrigues of the unscrupulous does not find him at a disadvantage. Henceforth master of his emotions and expert at avoiding entanglements his better judgment could not sanction, he cleverly picks his way across the network of snares stretched for him on all sides by coquettes, mothers, and young ladies. He knows how to deal with each, and at the same time offend none. Affable without an overweening desire to please, he impresses his superiority by his very care to conceal it, and his greatest charm he derives from his indifference to charm. His gravity pleases the men, his modesty delights the women. He has mastered the art of adapting himself to circumstances and persons and always appearing to the best advantage.

Serene, accomplished, cheerful but not loud;

Insinuating without insinuation;

Observant of the foibles of the crowd,

Yet ne'er betraying this in conversation;

Proud with the proud, yet courteously proud,

So as to make them feel he knew his station

And theirs:--without a struggle for priority.

He neither brooked nor claimed superiority. --xv:15.

English life, it is evident, has robbed Don Juan of his spontaneity, and has taught him to withdraw within himself, to keep silence about his opinions and feelings, or to express them only when he considers it to his advantage to make them known. In affairs of the heart he has become reserved and deferential rather than masterful, ingenious at modelling himself upon a woman's ideal and enshrining himself as the hero of her imagination. Gay, grave, sentimental, and frivolous by turns, he very gently but irresistibly entices all hearts whither he would, without revealing his intentions. Behold him now transformed into the prudent politician who to the innate tact of a nobleman adds the finesse of a diplomat, the penetration of a psychologist, and the discreet judgment of a sage taught by experience. The ingenuous, the naïve youth is thoroughly dead in him: the man schooled by life has taken his place. Henceforth his matured reason is no longer the dupe of his heart.

Such is the Don Juan that Byron conceived, and such are the stages of his evolution. He is, on the whole, a generous, enthusiastic hero, inspired by lofty sentiments and noble ideas; eager for beauty, love, and glory; impatient to enjoy with all the intensity of his being the delights to which nature and life invite a vigorous body and an ardent spirit; quite ready to rove over the earth to gratify his restless passions. But the flowers of poetry that were springing up within him are blighted by reality. With contact with disillusionment, misfortune, and human perversity, his dreams take

wing, his zeal abates, his heart grows cold. His natural spontaneity gradually disappears to give place to self-interest. Reason, doubt, and disdain rout imagination, faith, and enthusiasm.

This Don Juan whose ideal has been slowly stifled by the vulgar realities of existence yet remains honest and sympathetic in his disappointment and scepticism. In contrast with the traditional hero, he is not essentially wicked. In him there is nothing of the egotistical debauchee that preceding ages had portrayed. If he still seduces women, it is involuntarily, by his beauty, his youth, and all the charms of his presence and his wit; toward them he uses neither violence nor art, and makes no effort to deceive them by false vows and lying promises: he is always sincere in his loves. The Spanish Don Juan, rescued half-drowned by a fisher-girl, seduces his benefactress by an offer of marriage, and later abandons her without a qualm. Byron's Don Juan does not aim to please Haidée: they love each other with the same swift impulse of their hearts, without volition on either part. And their love comes to an end without infidelity, for it is a foreign force that separates them; if the more sensitive young girl dies at the departure of her lover, yet he has left her only when loaded with chains, and then he is torn by grief and impotent rage.

Just here is one of the traits that most differentiates him from his predecessors: they were incapable of love, whereas this Don Juan loves. To him love is neither a triumph of vanity nor a passing desire; it is an irresistible instinct that intoxicates him, sense and soul, a universal law of nature that he obeys without thought of evil. So even in his less chaste loves there is a certain pur-

ity and elemental innocence. The incessant need of change that tormented the others was only a form of sensual luxury, only the craving, brutal or refined according to the individual, for a new sensation. In his case, circumstances over which he has no control make him love in many different directions, but he is not by nature inconstant. There is nothing in him of immediate satiety nor perverse curiosity; his heart has found its object and remains fixed, for in every woman he seeks the same thing: to him Haidée, Julia, and the others are only the slightly differing incarnations of love. This is the first respect in which he is romantic. His inconstancy is in reality only homage rendered womankind. As the artist loves the different forms that he admires not for their own sakes, but because in each of them his ideal is expressed, and as his admiration for one does not prejudice his admiration for another, even so what Don Juan adores in each woman is an image of beauty which he has conceived: he can love all without faithlessness to any.

Moreover, in his love are romantic and lyrical qualities beyond the ken of his predecessors. His idyllic love-affair with Haidée is the romantic duet of two beings who soar above the plane of common life. In their ecstasy they stroll along the seaside at the melancholy hour of sundown and whisper to each other

Sweet playful phrases, which would seem absurd

To those who have ceased to hear such, or ne'er heard.--iv:14.

Don Juan is sometimes pensive; he loves to drift into reverie at evening time in the Gothic chamber before which waves a willow, and where the distant murmur of a lake comes to his ears enveloped in the

mystery of night; there he

meditated, fond

Of those sweet bitter thoughts which banish sleep,

And make the worldling sneer, the youngling weep. --xvi:110.

He has hours of gloom and depression worthy of Werther. At the same time he has that almost fatal charm of romantic heroes derived from the combination of his fabulous adventures, his oriental amours -- now in a seraglio and now with an Empress -- his exploits at the siege of Ismail, the half-mystery that hangs about his life, his beauty, and his brilliant personality. He excels in every bodily exercise; he surpasses all in horseback riding, hunting, swimming, and dancing; he has distinctive taste in dress; his person, his bearing are such that Psyche herself would take him for Cupid.

These rare qualities, which to a woman's taste are seasoned by a light dash of libertinism, cast a fine glamor about him. And so he is not the one that must make the first advances; women go to him unbidden. He naturally inspires their love, drawing hearts to him without the effort, without even the wish, to do so. Julia by her sighs and glances made him guess what she awaited from him. Haidée loved him even before he had made himself known to her. From the moment he appeared at the court of Russia,

the ladies whispered, and

The Empress smiled:---

--iv:46.

In England

Fair virgins blushed upon him; wedded dames

Bloomed also in less transitory hues.

--xi:48.

Romantic, then, in his lyricism and in his fatal gift of inspiring love, he is romantic further because instead of representing, as formerly, a stratum of society, and revealing certain social conditions, instead of being the symbolic expression of an external and objective reality, he expresses nothing else so much as the personality of his creator. The writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries put nothing of themselves into their portrait of him. Whether they took living persons for copy or imitated earlier models, they ascribed to their heroes sentiments and beliefs borrowed from their countries and their times. Byron proceeds in the opposite direction: far from making his hero a general type, he has made him a very individual character, more or less, ^{indeed} ~~moreover~~, his own double. The feelings and personal convictions with which he endows him are his own. He lends him his tastes, his sympathies, his aversions, his very physical powers, even to his hardihood in once swimming the Hellespont ~~Beasphorus~~. Least Byronic of the heroes of Byron, in so being Don Juan becomes the hero most like Byron.

Herein lies the explanation of why, in contrast with the preceding Don Juans, he is painted in a favorable light. Had the author followed the lines of the traditional portrait, he would have found himself in an awkward position. It is interesting, on the other hand, to note that if he has given his hero all the qualities, physical, moral, and intellectual, so blended as to make a superior, and in fact an almost perfect man, he has left him the few petty defects that seem calculated still further to enhance his excellency by rendering his perfection less severe and more human.

But if by reason of these characteristics Don Juan partakes of

romanticism, he still lacks many of the elements requisite ^{to} of the truly romantic. He was not conceived beyond the bounds of all truth and likelihood, as were the majority of the heroes of René and Werther. From among these phantoms, the products of imaginations sickened by chimeras, these creatures wretched with no real suffering, wasted with no disease, the dupes of vague sentimentality and bombast, incapable of action -- from among these pale and unsubstantial figures the Don Juan of Byron stands forth in the firm attitude of vigorous manhood; he is a man of action, aware of the contingencies and realities of the world, too sane, too well-balanced, to give way to a vague mysticism.

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The transformation undergone by the hero of the poem and the introduction of new adventures into the primitive plot, some actual and almost contemporaneous, would naturally entail changes no less important in the characters and rôles of the women Don Juan meets with in his journeyings. In this matter many other writers had already taken the greatest liberties with the fable: neither Shadwell nor Goldini was at great pains to preserve the female figures that tradition seemed to have consecrated. Yet some one of them, though under a different name, is always to be found in their plays. Byron, on the contrary, has here too made a complete innovation, because the characters in the old legend were not available in the story as he had conceived it. The heroines of the poem are borrowed from modern times, and there is no thread of connection between them and the Donna Annas, the Tisbeas and the Elvires of the Spanish, the Ital-

ian and the French plays.

The poet has, of course, painted a certain number of female characters chosen from different countries and different orders of society. Obviously he wished to make a general study of the feminine heart: young girls and old maids, wives and mothers, women of the north and of the south, society women and peasant women, sweet-hearts, adventuresses, bluestockings -- not one is overlooked in his survey. What he says is not profound, nor is it absolutely original and purely malevolent. He insists upon the predominance in the sex of sentiment and even of sentimentality over reason; he enlarges upon the subterfuges, jealousies, scandals, and lies which, in his opinion, throw the greatest light upon the feminine personality. But all this teaches us nothing new about the heart of woman, and hardly rises above the tedium of the conventional. Byron's psychology lacks penetration and finesse. He little apprehends the complexity of emotions. He perceives the outward manifestations of the passions better than the inward operations of the heart.

Nevertheless, he does draw distinctions according to climates, conditions, and ages. He makes categories of temperaments and characters. Villemain maintains that Byron has painted but one woman, the woman yielding to a man, capable of anything to gratify her love. As a matter of fact, Byron's type is less uniform than this, at least in Don Juan. It is true that in such poems as The Giaour and The Corsair the woman hardly partakes of reality: she is a conventional creature who abandons herself to love, a creature of absolute psychological simplicity. She is woman as the romantic

drama shows her; loving and passionate, but never experiencing deepening or change of love.

In Don Juan the delineation is both truer and more varied: now it is the young girl as nature has fashioned her, stranger to the customs of society, ignorant of its restraints, spontaneously obeying instincts which she has not learned to control and from which she expects no harm. This is the naive Haïdée, the Greek girl grown up on a lonely island, far from men and the world, for whom the sight of Don Juan is the sudden revelation of love. She yields herself without coquetry, without reserve, for to love is a natural law and a good. Bereft of her passion, life no longer holds meaning for her, and she suddenly dies, as though deprived of all reason for existence when her lover is torn from her.

In contrast with her, Julia is the woman of the southland, of glowing passion unrestrained by any severity of ethics or rigor of law. Spanish though she is, she seems modelled upon the 'perçerse' Venetians sketched in one of Byron's letters. [The Italian ethics are the most singular ever met with. The perversion, not only of action, but of reasoning, is singular in the women. It is not that they do not consider the thing in itself as wrong, and very wrong, but love (the sentiment of love) is not merely an excuse for it, but makes it an actual virtue, provided it is disinterested, and not a caprice, and is confined to one object. (Letter to Moore, March 25, 1817.)] Subterfuge and lying are here enlisted under the banner of love, with an art of seduction at once instinctive and cultivated and a disconcerting impudence in denying the change, in playing the

comedy of grief and indignation. Here is the woman who combats with all the power of her intellect and the subtlety of her wit the restraints of marriage which stand in the way of her liberty.

There is still more brutality in the gross caprice which the sight of Don Juan quickens in the Sultana. Repressed by seclusion in the seraglio, her senses endure abstinence from indulgence with the impatience natural in a young, passionate creature, accustomed to gratifying every desire except the one that comes from the heart. More refined and no less intense is the amorous fury of Catherine, that Messalina of the North; she is at the same time the woman of moods that brings men to their destruction, and the blasé woman that seeks to vary her sensations by passing from a maturer gallant to a sentimental young lover. All these women, some with innocent spontaneity, others with the perversity of experience, are at bottom sensual creatures living only for love and yielding themselves to it with the irresistible passion of young animals accomplishing their function.

The type changes somewhat in crossing over to England. Here the bestiality is more cloaked; love becomes less a corporeal thing, is refined and has a gloss of intellectuality. And in so doing it only becomes the more corrupt. A sense of shame has come into it; it is no longer offered with candor or cynicism, but slyly, with hypocritical mien. The English woman is virtuous after the manner of mermaids, whose

Beginnings are fair faces, ends mere fishes; --xii:73

her art is that of calmly gliding into a heart rather than taking it by storm. She shows only half her charms, to kindle the greater de-

sire for the rest, and has all the talents that best serve the interests of the devil. Grande passion is rare with her; most of the time her love is only a passing whim: one is a coquette who amuses herself at the cruel sport of setting hearts on fire, and without ever saying no, never says yes; another wearies her lover with her captives and her tender quarrels, passes from ardor to indifference, and charms and torments him by turns; this one plays the sentimentalist, that the puritan. The gallery is inexhaustible; from the young girl still enveloped in the mystery of her innocence to the experienced matron, not one is lacking.

From among the crowd a single one stands out, whom the poet has presented in a more favorable light, but not without malicious intent. This is Lady Amundeville, the accomplished noblewoman, an English Diana of the Ephesians, whose discretion of itself refutes any suggestion of slander. Courteous to every one, free from coquetry, reserved and dignified, she accepts the adoration of men with the indifference of a queen, as natural homage. She is a marble statue of spotless purity; yet deep within her burns a secret fire -- as

beneath the snow

-- a Volcano holds the lava more

Within.

--xiii:36.

Or she is like a bottle of champagne,

Frozen into a very vinous ice

Which leaves few drops of that immortal rain,

Yet in the very centre, past all price,

About a liquid glassful will remain;

And this is stronger than the strongest grape

Could e'er express in its expanded shape;--

--xiii:37.

This chaste wife of a man too cold and preoccupied to satisfy the needs of her heart soon conceives a ^{sublimous} sub~~limous~~ love for Don Juan, which she screens under the names of sympathy and friendship. But the smiles of a coquette upon the young man and his attentions to his neighbor at table awaken in her a jealousy which would have gently led her on to the destruction of her virtue, did not the interruption of the poem arrest her downfall.

This portrait, flattering though it is, is not sketched without ulterior motives: Lady Amundeville, the haughty noblewoman whose somewhat frigid dignity keeps all gallants at a distance, whose austerity frowns upon the too generously displayed charms of a friend, is not herself proof against temptation. Under the mask of this Diana is concealed the ever frail Eve; faithful to her husband, indifferent to homage, her heart unsullied by any blameworthy desire, that day when Love appears to her in the person of Don Juan she goes to swell the rout of the worshippers of the god. In her perhaps more than in the others the poet seems to have given expression to his philosophy of womankind, simple and superficial enough: everywhere under heaven, regardless of age and temperament, woman is only a priestess of Love; as a young girl she vaguely longs for and awaits what as yet she knows not; when Love has once been revealed to her she is ever in quest of an altar on which to sacrifice to him. Whether her name is Julia or Catherine, Lady Amundeville or Haidée; whether she is an empress, the wife of a young lord, or the wife of a Barthalo, whether a sultana or a simple maiden, Love rules her and

absorbs her passions. Under his yoke all women bow themselves and are on an equality. The inferior of man in every other respect, in the art of love woman is his superior. Don Juan is not her seducer, but her dupe. Curious interchange of rôles this! Henceforth the egotistical and deceitful creature is the woman. She it is that makes the advances to which Don Juan responds. Whereas in the original legend, respected by all the imitators of the insipid Spanish drama, she was the ignorant and defenseless victim of the libertine, in Byron's poem she becomes the expert and very dangerous creature against whom the man must protect himself.

Society has made love less an alliance than a conflict, in which man and woman meet as adversaries; they begin with skirmishes and continue in merciless combat from which one or the other comes forth vanquished. The vanquished is usually the man. He has entered the fray more guilelessly, and knowing nothing of strategem soon finds himself outgeneraled. The woman, forced by the laws of the combat to resort to subterfuge, attacks her enemy with arms drawn from her own weakness. Finally, the man is victim of the instruments he has fashioned to guarantee his own supremacy. Love, as he has hedged it round, is a challenge to nature: it is contrary to her eternal laws that man and woman should unite in marriage, for

Marriage from Love, like vinegar from wine --iii:5.

is a 'sober beverage' to which time adds tang. Thanks to ethics and legislation, Love has been outlawed. Put under the ban, he hides his face; he is a shameful pariah who lives by stealth, by dint of deceit and hypocrisy. Cast out from society, he takes underhand revenge and wreaks his spite by sowing misery and evil broadcast.

Such, in the last analysis, is perhaps the deepest significance of the poem. By repudiating Love and enchaining him, Love, the great god friend of liberty, in bonds of tyranny, civilization has made man a victim of the perfidies of woman, and woman a grovelling slave, doomed to a life of lies.

Whereas the old fable of Don Juan condemned the man who, without legal and religious sanction, persists in loving according to his instincts, Byron's poem, written under the influence of the author's marital infelicities, his hatred of all restraint, and probably also the anti-social invectives of Rousseau, is above all an arraignment by turns violent and ironical of this union of the sexes as perverted by the Church into a sacrament and by the State into a contract. Against such a caricature of love as is marriage, he opposes true love -- that is, free love. He reinstates this outcast of all religions and legislations. What Christianity has looked upon as the triumph of Satan and has loaded with anathema, Byron deifies; before its power he makes dogmas and laws make obeisance; he declares it the fountainhead of noble sentiments and lofty thoughts, the source of poetry, the enemy of hypocrisy and vice.

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This reinstatement of free love, together with the glorification of ideas condemned by a social code formulated by men and the systematic defilement of human institutions; this transformation of Don Juan, the ancient symbol of egotistical and corrupt sense triumphant over soul, into a symbol of generous and fruitful nature, the source of all truth and virtue;--this deliberate inversion of all

tradition produced two effects in public opinion, diametrically opposed to each other: Europe applauded this new satire on man as less violent than the imprecations of Manfred and Childe Harold, but no less profound. In it one finds the misanthropy of the preceding poems expressed with more sincerity. The vehement declamations against virtue are succeeded by a more biting, if less eloquent, irony; evil doctrines are again paraded, with less ostentation and more assurance. The pessimism à la mode, presented in less theatrical fashion, becomes more depressing. Judged as a whole, the poem looms up an enormous work, ending in a mighty nothingness. It suited the taste of the public because of the general scepticism induced in intellectual Europe by the failure of the hopes of '89. Goethe in 1821 proclaimed it a 'grenzenlos-geniales Werk', and in a letter to Murray of May 26, 1822, Byron congratulated himself on the success his Don Juan had met with in Germany. Even in England Shelley expressed enthusiasm for it, and in a letter of August 15, 1821, he declared that Don Juan, which had then reached the Fifth Canto, placed Byron above all contemporary poets. On October twenty-first of the same year, thanking Byron *for sending him the* x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x ~~the~~ Third, Fourth and Fifth Cantos, he declared that nothing like it had ever been written in English. Walter Scott said in the Edinburg Weekly Journal of May 19, 1824, that the author had encompassed the whole of human life, and 'sounded every string of the divine harp, from its slightest to its most powerful and heart-astounding tones'.

But these eulogies, in the case of the poet's countrymen, were

the exception, and were delivered by his friends. English sentiment was almost unanimous in crying out upon the immorality of the poem. The indignation aroused -- the violence of which may now surprise us -- was moreover well warranted. The production wounded the English in all that was dearest to them: in their traditions, their patriotism, their respect for morality and institutions, in their prudery, and still more perhaps in their self-esteem. It humiliated them in the eyes of the foreigner by unmasking them, by bringing to light those faults that they jealously kept under cover, by revealing in them the vices which they loved to censure in other nations, and from which they fondly believed themselves alone exempt. The poet's aspersions upon the character of the King and upon Wellington and the numerous other lampoons with which the work teemed, raised a clamor of indignation. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, in its issue of August, 1819, reviewing the first two cantos, and fully recognizing the value of the work as a 'most admirable specimen of the mixture of ease, strength, gayety, and seriousness', accuses the author of being 'manly and meanly disloyal to his Sovereign and his country'. The anonymous review considers no less indecent the allusions to his wife with which Byron opens his poem.¹ But the scandal was caused above all by the profession of immorality, by the deliberate defilement of virtue, and the systematic exaltation of wickedness. In the name of outraged English

1. --- 'for offenses such as this, which speak the wilful and determined spite of an unrelenting, unsoftened, smiling, sarcastic, joyous sinner, for such diabolical, such slavish vice, there can be neither pity, nor pardon.'

morality he was put under the ban of public opinion. this wretched author who laughed with despicable gaiety at all noble sentiments, at love, honour, and religion. This work was an 'insult which no wicked man of genius had ever before dared to put upon his Creator'. Southey made Byron a disciple of Satan; Jeffrey, in an article in The Edinburg Review, while recognizing that the author of Don Juan sincerely believed he desired the welfare of humanity, declared pernicious the general tendency of a poem full of indecency, inspired by deep-seated scepticism, and tending to the denial of the 'existence of truth and honor'. The review pointed out, not without perspicacity, that the greatest danger of the work lay not in the perversion of its teachings, but rather in the method of setting them forth, which is that of attributing this perversion to characters that enlist the sympathy of the reader. The poet infuses his venom by first painting with as much strength as grace the most generous passions, and then showing that they are all rooted in self-interest. There is nothing more insidious than this type of humor, consisting as it does of exalting an emotion and then by a sarcasm plunging it into ridicule.

From all sides the same abuse and the same cries of insulted modesty greeted the successive publications of the different cantos. In an article of Blackwood's Magazine (July 1821) Don Juan was qualified as an 'indecent poem'. In February 1822 a critic who signed himself 'Siluriensis', while admitting that the immorality of the poem had been exaggerated, condemned the author's way of treating serious subjects with levity. The same magazine protested with comic indignation against the suggestion that such a work could have

appeared in its columns and soiled the office of its editor. The British Critic (August 1819 and September 1821), The British Review (August 1819 and December 1821), The Examiner (October 31, 1819, August 26, 1821, March 14 and 21, 1824), The Literary Gazette (July 1819, August 1821, July, September, December 1823 and April 1824), The Monthly Review (July 1819, August 1821, July and October 1823, and April 1824), and The Quarterly Review (July 1822) continued to censure and attack, almost without qualification, the indecency of the poem.

Poetry joined her voice to prose in the chorus of imprecation. In the issue of November 1819 of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, an author who signed himself M. N. brought out under the title of Don Juan Unread a little poem which he had, he said, composed the preceding Tuesday, between eleven o'clock and midnight, when he had fallen asleep over The Constable Magazine. These verses written in sleep prove to bear an extraordinary resemblance to a poem of Wordsworth, Yarrow Unvisited.

Yarrow Unvisited

From Stirling castle we had seen
The mazy Forth unravelled;
Had trod the banks of Clyde and
Tay,
And with the Tweed had travelled;
And when we came to Clovenford,
Then said my "winsome Marrow",
"Whate'er betide, we'll turn
aside,
And see the Braes of Yarrow."

etc.

Don Juan Unread

Of Corinth castle we had read
The amazing siege unravelled;
Had swallowed Lara and the Giaour;
And with Childe Harold travelled;
And so we followed cloven-foot
As faithfully as any.
Until he cried, "Come, turn aside
And read of Don Giovanni."

etc.

The poem, which comprises eight stanzas, is merely a wordy appeal to honest folk not to read Don Juan, that 'shameless tale', that 'crop of blasphemy'.

In February 1822 the same magazine published a satirical review in verse of the different works of Byron; the author argued that the poet had not dared publish the first two cantos of Don Juan under his own name, such was his own shame of their unseemliness; the following three, he said, decent by comparison, were on the other hand much more tiresome. Other poems, no less insipid, no less insolent, continued to appear.

These attacks did not leave Byron indifferent. On the contrary, they touched him to the quick, and embittered his already ulcerated heart. The indignation aroused by the First Canto surprised and wounded him: in a letter to his editor, Murray (February 1, 1819), he rails at those who are scandalized by the story, and maintains that his is 'the most moral of poems'. But the public did not understand the morality. Somewhere else (Letter to Murray, April 6, 1819), he angrily declares that he did not write with the intention of pleasing his fellow-countrymen: he had never thought of flattering their opinions or their pride, nor was he making 'Ladies' books'. The protests of his editor and his friends had no effect other than to wound him and drive him to more extreme views: 'I am particularly aware', he wrote Murray (May 6, 1819), 'that Don Juan must set us all by the ears; but that is my concern.' And on August 1st, in a letter to the same, he declared his disdain of public opinion and his intention not to be guided by it. These moods of defiance were followed by hours of discouragement: on October 28th, 1819, although he was composing the

Third Canto, he wrote to Mr. Hoppner that the failure of the first two cantos and the attacks of the public had 'weakened his estro'. An article in Blackwood's Magazine (August 1819) in which he was accused of slandering womanhood called forth an aggrieved letter: he complains that he was the victim of women, that his whole life had been 'sacrificed to them and by them'.

Although he had been identified as the anonymous author of the first two cantos, Byron instructed Murray to continue to publish Don Juan without his name (Letter to Murray, August 23, 1819), and in pursuing the composition of the poem hearkened more to the voice of public opinion. A Mr. Saunders, an Englishman resident in Venice, having said that Don Juan was all Grub Street -- the street of beggars and miserable poets -- Byron, to whom the remark was repeated, was so affected by it that for a time he could not write a single line. He seems -- though he did not admit it -- to have entertained doubts as to the value of his work. He hesitated to publish the Third and Fourth Cantos, in which he missed 'the Spirit' of the first ones, and which he declared had not been written 'con amore'. He even feared lest the publication of Don Juan might raise opposition to his rights over his daughter. In October, 1820, he thought of abandoning the subject. 'I don't feel inclined', he wrote Murray (October 12, 1820) 'to care further about Don Juan', and he brought to the support of his decision a recent anecdote. 'What do you think a very pretty Italian lady said to me the other day? She had read it in the French, and paid me some compliments, with due DRAWBACKS, upon it. I answered that what she said was true, but that I suspected it would

live longer than Childe Harold. "Ah but (said She) I would rather have the fame of Childe Harold for THREE YEARS than an IMMORTALITY of Don Juan!" Such a thrust wounded him, although he attributed the severity of his women readers to the too great truth of his work, and their bad taste in preferring to reality the fantasies of the imagination and the romantic exaltation of the passions. If he renounced the idea of leaving the poem unfinished, he at least mitigated the licentiousness of tone so much that Shelley, speaking of the Fourth Canto, could declare that it contained not a word that the most rigid defender of human dignity could wish to suppress. (Aug. 7, 1821)

Public censure was not disarmed, however, and it finally had its effect upon the poet. In a letter of December 25th, 1822, alluding to a very severe article on his work which appeared in Caligman's Magazine, he almost made excuses for the critic obliged to accept the ^{judg}ment of the majority.

This judgment, which was so severe in England during his lifetime, has hardly been softened since then. By his attitude, by his affectation of braving conventions in a country where respect for tradition is considered the foundation of society, Byron makes himself a pariah, a sort of Belot, in the midst of his countrymen. Besides, his romanticism, his factitious sentiments, and his systematic exploration of the strange and bizarre, could not be relished by a people who have a mania for reality and an aversion to paradoxes.

For quite a different reason the Don Juan of Byron failed on

the Continent to meet with the success of Childe Harold. French romanticism, enthusiastic over heroes that have their being apart from common life, was naturally little moved by the still very material passions and earthy ideal of the English Don Juan. Again, this unfinished, disconcerting poem, in which were mingled satire and lyric qualities, dream and reality, this poem filled with hidden meanings, mental reservations, and private adventures of the author, and inspired throughout by the most personal considerations; this half-veiled autobiography, was little understood by a public knowing nothing of English life and unfamiliar with much of the material that constituted the most original part of the work.

In a word, Byron's Don Juan did not even correspond to the romantic conception of a Hero. Moreover, formed of elements theretofore unheard of, absolutely peculiar to the author and his sphere, he is connected only by the most artificial of means with the line of his predecessors. Byron is not content to modify the original material and form -- a transformation which would of necessity come about when the fable became too old and improbable. He has completely changed the nature of the theme, has deliberately broken with tradition and given the poem so special a character that we cannot assign it a place among the works sprung from the old Spanish play. His Don Juan is related to no other, past nor even future. It stands alone, absolutely unique. It has overstepped the boundaries within which a legend, for all its modifications, must remain, if it is to retain its original character.

